University of Alberta

Homicide of People with Developmental Disabilities: Content Analysis of Print Media

by

Richard Edmond Lucardie ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Special Education

Department of Educational Psychology

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To Lori Raye Yanish

ABSTRACT

While the past decade has seen an increasing interest in crimes against people with developmental disabilities (PWDD), little attention has been given to the homicides of PWDD. This dissertation provides a preliminary description of homicides of PWDD, and examines the Canadian media's portrayal of people with cerebral palsy (PWCP) in public life particularly as it relates to homicide news. The first of three studies examined the homicide of PWDD using a database consisting of 1128 media cases involving 1976 deaths. The second study examined a subset of the original database, focusing on 308 media cases involving 314 intrafamilial homicides of PWDD. Through content analysis, findings from these two studies indicated that acquaintances, caregivers, family members, government representatives, roommates and strangers were all implicated in the homicides of PWDD. The majority of those killed were children four years of age or younger. Death resulting from neglect, burns, beating, shooting, asphyxia, and poisoning were the most common. Discussion focused on media presentation of homicide, theories of aggression and violence, child abuse, homicide, discrimination of PWDD, and prevention. The third study focused on the Canadian media and their portrayal of PWCP. Between January 1994 and December 2000, 3939 media stories were indexed which included the term *cerebral palsy*. The media's use of stigmatizing language such as *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffers from*, or *suffering from*, was significantly more frequently used within the context of cerebral palsy and homicide than stories with other content. Tracy Latimer's homicide provided an extreme example of the media associating stigmatizing terms with the killing of PWCP. Discussion focused on self-

categorization theory, media effect, and factors associated with discrimination against PWCP.

PREFACE

This manuscript is about the homicide of people with developmental disabilities (PWDD). Information presented provides a first time estimate of the number of PWDD who have been victims of homicide, general demographics regarding gender and age of PWDD, and their relationship to those implicated in their death. Additional information focuses on the most common acts causing death, charges against and conviction of those implicated in their homicide, and an examination of the media's use of bias in language in presenting stories about people with cerebral palsy.

This research was undertaken with four goals in mind:

1. To provide an estimate of the number of PWDD who have been victims of homicide, and determine the nature of these acts.
2. To determine who is being killed and by whom.
3. To determine if biased language has been used by the media and in what context when describing people with cerebral palsy.
4. To offer strategies for abuse prevention.

My interest in abuse and disability issues was fostered through my experience in working with Dr. Sobsey on the Abuse and Disability Project at the University of Alberta, which led to the publication of *Violence & Disability: An Annotated Bibliography* (Sobsey, Wells, Lucardie, & Mansell, 1995). This experience and Canada's debate on assisted suicide and euthanasia in the 1990s contributed to my Master's research of the Netherlands' euthanasia and assisted suicide policy. As an associate with the J.P. Das Developmental Disabilities Centre at the University of Alberta, I assisted with research on the portrayal of people with disabilities in film and the media. As part of my Doctoral research, I received three years of funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to examine print media crimes against people with disabilities. My collaborative work with Dr. Sobsey, who had established a database of homicides of PWDD, resulted in this manuscript.

My interests in psychology were fostered by general curiosity about why individuals behave as they do. Psychological inquiry involves, in part, the investigation of a common language spoken between clients/patients and those within their environment.

Miscommunication of verbal and/or nonverbal language may at times contribute to misunderstandings, prejudices, or discrimination. Through identification of a common language, clearer communication may be possible. This may then contribute to greater understanding among individuals and, hopefully greater tolerance of individual differences. Distance theory helps to explain, in part, the breakdown of communication between individuals, sometimes contributing to prejudices and discrimination.

As a chartered psychologist, my work in private practice and within provincial and community hospitals continues to foster my interests in the areas of disability, in particular, the vulnerability of some populations in society to prejudice and discrimination. I have worked with children and adults with abuse histories, developmental disabilities, mental disorders, and physical disabilities. As a psychologist, part of my role is to try and establish a means of communication with my client/patient that is respectful of individual differences and experiences, in order to assist individuals in helping themselves. In working with others, I try to stress the importance of incorporating preventative measures when addressing mental health concerns and environmental stressors. In order to incorporate any preventative measures, one needs to be able to identify those variables that may be contributing to the patient's/client's lived experiences. This process has been applied to this research.

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I have been fortunate to be able to share my experiences in graduate school, during my internship, with chartering, and professionally, with many whom have left a lasting impression on me. To my dear friends and colleagues, Mr. Angelo Caputo, Dr. Monty Nelson, Dr. Wade Radall, and Dr. Brent Symes, your support throughout the years, during times of tribulation and celebration, has meant a great deal to me and has carried me past may obstacles. Thanks guys. To the Psymetry team, both your professional and personal support came when the need was great. Thank you. To other friends, colleagues, and fellow classmates, too many to list, which I have had the pleasure to know and work with, you remain in my thoughts.

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Chapter I

Introduction

"The Last of the Victims"

On April 20, 1999, two students in Littleton, Colorado killed 12 fellow students and one teacher before committing suicide. Twenty-three others were wounded. The press went to work gathering information by interviewing police, students, teachers, staff, family members, and anyone else who had anything to say about the perpetrators or victims. They were in the midst of an enormous task, not only to get the facts, but also to make sense out of it for the millions of readers, viewers, and listeners around the world who would experience the mass homicides and their aftermath vicariously through the media.

The stories of bright, beautiful, and athletic students who were killed, disfigured, or disabled as a result of the shootings provided much of the raw material for stories that editors printed and readers consumed. For example, when the Associated Press provided "thumbnail sketches" of the students killed at the Littleton, Co. High School, they listed the name and age of each student along with a brief paragraph. The paragraphs that were provided for eleven of the twelve slain students included the following phrases attesting to the students' virtues:

1. "Active in church youth programs…
2. "Loved to golf, hunt and fish…
3. "Dreamed of being a Navy top gun…
4. "Aspiring songwriter and author…
5. "Played on offensive and defensive lines. Maintained A average…
6. "Excelled in math and science, and earned straight A's on last report card…
7. "Shot while holding an exit door open for fleeing students…
8. "Played lead in a student-written school play…
9. "Wanted to attend an arts college and become a music executive…
10. "Went on missionary trip to Mexico with family last year and built a house for poor people…

11. "Member of the National Honor Society and candidate for valedictorian…
(Associated Press , 1999, April 22)

The twelfth student, however, had only the following information listed: "Kyle Velasquez, age unknown, male." This Associated Press Story ran in newspapers across the United States and around the world with these descriptions of 11 of the 12 slain students under a variety of headlines, for example:

"A personal effect: Littleton attaches victims' names, faces to its grief" *(Dallas Morning News,* Floyd & Sickles, 1999, p. 1A),

"Slain students had myriad dreams" (*USA Today,* 1999, p. A3),

"The Colorado tragedy / Their faces, their Stories" (*Newsday,* Frank, Kowal, & Kass, 1999, p. A04.)

Some newspapers left Kyle Velasquez' name entirely off the list of those murdered (e.g., *The Guardian* [Charlottetown], "Shooting victims had big dreams," 1999; *Toronto Sun,* "Athletes, dreamers among dead," 1999). Similarly the *Edmonton Journal* listed the names and information about 12 of the 13 people killed that day, the 11 students and one teacher, and simply left out any mention of the thirteenth homicide victim (Future dreams died with victims, 1999). Other papers added details about some of the students from their own reporters and other sources to the original Associated Press material, but none of the early reports included any information on Kyle Velasquez other than his name and gender.

Many papers collectively characterized the slain students as superior achievers and members of the academic elite. *The Toronto Star,* ran the thumbnail sketches under the headline, "Victims were all high achievers" (1999, p. A12). *The Ottawa Citizen* was less direct in characterizing the victims as the best and brightest, running the profiles under the extended headline, "Denver's dead: Profiles in tragedy: Victims had big dreams; Valedictorian candidate among those slain" (Virengia, 1999, p. A.6). Similarly, the Globe and Mail characterized the victims in their headline as "students who loved music, sports, the challenge of learning" (Snapshot portraits…, 1999). A few went even further in constructing the story of the tragedy as an assault that was perhaps deliberately directed against these high achievers. For example, one story suggested that by targeting the library, the killers had ensured that they would kill only the academically elite (Sapsted, 1999).

The Ottawa Citizen was direct but polite in mentioning the omission of information of the thirteenth homicide victim: “All that is known of the last of the victims is his name, Kyle Velasquez” (Virengia, 1999, p. A.6). This young man, who was actually the first to be killed in the high school library that day, had now been transformed to into the “last of the victims.”

Only a handful of American papers and none of the Canadian papers ever filled in the missing information about Kyle Velasquez. In fact, Kyle was not a high achiever, if the only achievements to be considered are academics, sports, and making money. Kyle was not a candidate for valedictorian. His academic achievement was only at the third or fourth grade level in several areas. He had been rejected and teased for most of his life because of his intellectual disability. However, most teachers and students at Columbine High knew Kyle as a “Gentle Giant” who had a developmental disability, and felt that he achieved a lot. Kyle earned the respect of many of his fellow students and teachers for his openness and kindness (Franke-Folstad, 1999). He started to make friends and fit in at Columbine High School. Although he had sometimes been rejected by his peers and some parents had refused to let their children play with Kyle when he was alive, 1200 people attended his funeral (Franke-Folstad, 1999). Surely, reporters could have found someone who could have told them something about Kyle Valesquez. Perhaps they did, but the media did not appear to readily communicate this information to their national and international audience. The Columbine shooting that destroyed one student’s dream of graduating as class valedictorian also destroyed Kyle Velasquez’ dream of getting a summer job in a grocery store.

Kyle Velasquez had transferred into the school only a few months earlier after a series of unsuccessful school placements. The day that Kyle was killed during his lunch break in the school library was one of the first days that he stayed at school through the entire day, including lunch. Perhaps Kyle was just beginning to feel included. Ironically, Kyle, who probably had experienced a lot more rejection or teasing than the shooters, became the target of revenge of those who felt they had been teased and excluded.

Perhaps, there could have been a story in that, but the boy who was excluded so often in life was, for the most part, excluded again by the press in his death.

How was Kyle Velasquez transformed from the first one killed to the "last" of the Columbine High victims? Why was his story and picture omitted from most of the news stories that circulated around the world in the days immediately following the Columbine tragedy? Were reporters simply unable to find any information about Kyle Velasquez during the first days after the Columbine shooting or was he systematically excluded from the coverage? Was it merely a matter of coincidence that the one Columbine victim that did not easily fit the widespread journalistic construction of the academic elite cut down in their prime was also the one excluded?

Before & After

In fact, Kyle Velasquez was not the only student shot at Columbine High School that day who had a developmental disability. Mark Kintgen, who has cerebral palsy, was seriously wounded in the head and neck, but survived. Developmental disabilities affect one or two percent of the population, so the two students with developmental disabilities shot at Columbine High School were about three to four times the number that might be expected at random. Kintgen's story seemed less difficult for the press to handle than the Kyle Velasquez story. Mark did not have an intellectual disability. In fact, he was among the academic high-achievers at the school. Nevertheless, his story did present a challenge for the media. It was difficult fitting Kintgen into that mold of stories of others who acquired disabilities as a result of the shooting that suggested that good lives had been ruined. For example, a *Rocky Mountain News* story (Morson & Garner, 1999) focussed on two students who faced the possibility of partial paralysis. It emphasized the potential loss for one of these students, " Ireland, 17, described by classmates as a brilliant student, may never fully recover use of his right arm and leg…" (p. 30A). The story quoted doctors saying that the most likely outcome for Ireland was that he would have "significant weakness on his right side." Although the story included updates on a number of other wounded students it did not mention Mark Kintgen, whose right hemiparesis (weakness on his right side) was precisely the condition that Ireland was expected to face (Smolowe, Rogers, & Bane, 1999).

A search for the name Mark Kintgen in three electronic news databases (Electric Library, Newslibrary, and Canadian Newsdisc) finds a total of 52 newspaper stories from 23 news sources that mention Mark Kintgen in relation to the Columbine shootings. Of these stories, only 3 (5.8%) mention that Mark Kintgen has cerebral palsy. All three appear in the *Rocky Mountain News* (15.0% of their stories mentioning Mark Kintgen). In addition, one national magazine source, *People*, mentioned that Mark Kintgen has cerebral palsy. Was Mark Kintgen's cerebral palsy relevant and should it have been mentioned in more of these news stories? There is no simple answer to this question. Clearly, Mark Kintgen had other attributes. There would certainly be something wrong if the press or people in general could not see beyond his cerebral palsy and felt that it was necessary to mention it any time Mark was mentioned. Perhaps the more rational question is whether Mark's disability is any less relevant than the academic and athletic abilities of injured students that the press continually felt it was important to mention.

The Killing of Golf-54

It was murder described as "so horrific and so rare that RCMP and FBI serial killer profilers have no similar cases on file" (Loyie, & Staples, 1994, p. G1). In the early morning hours of November 28, 1993, local residents called the fire department to report what they believed to be a rubbish fire in a park in Edmonton. When fire fighters arrived, they discovered a woman still alive and still burning. She had been beaten, soaked with gasoline, and set ablaze by an unknown assailant. Although she was burned over 80% of her body and in some places her flesh was burned away to the bone, she survived for 22 days before dying in hospital. She never completely regained consciousness and was burned beyond recognition. With no way of assigning a name or an identity to the burned woman, hospital staff asked the computer to generate a name and the software christened her, "Golf-54" (Loyie, & Staples, 1994, p. G1).

The crime against Golf-54 sparked enormous public outrage. The press joined in, and the police announced that, in spite of the fact that they had few leads, they were confident that the great amount of public interest would lead to a tip that would solve the case. That was before Joyce Marie Cardinal was identified as the victim. When Cardinal was identified, the newspapers also made it clear that Cardinal was native (Cree), mentally handicapped, receiving government assistance, and had a drinking problem. Although Cardinal's family made a point of telling the press that Joyce Cardinal was not mentally handicapped and only had impaired speech, the label would not go away. Almost seven years later, she was still described in the press as a "36-year-old mentally-handicapped woman" (Bergot, 2000, p. 5). The paper noted the lapse when reminded by a letter to the editor, however, they continued to use the same description *(Accused killer's case put over*, 2000). Other news stories provided a richer description of who Joyce Cardinal was, her abilities and disabilities. As one story suggested:

> Her life was shaped by a single fact, her speech impediment. It made people think she was mentally retarded, when she was not. It kept her out of an education. It pushed her out of her home town (Loyie & Staples, 1994, p. G1).

Nevertheless, both the press and the police commented on the rapid loss of public interest in the case as soon as Golf-54 was identified. The police indicated their frustration. As public interest waned, the tips did too. It is hard to say which label made the crime against Joyce Cardinal seem a little less significant than the crime against Golf-54. Was it because she was Cree, or because she was poor, or because she was disabled, or because she was a woman alone at night? Was it some combination of these things? In any case, the public appeared to lose interest and the press seemed to follow their lead.

Within a few months a new homicide victim, one who was white, able-bodied, and middle-class, was stabbed to death in her own home in Edmonton. Barb Danelesko appeared to be viewed by the press and by the public as a worthier victim. The tragedy of the Danelesko case was undeniable and the outrage that followed it was undoubtedly justified. But the lasting and overwhelming response to the tragic loss of Barb Danelesko was a sharp contrast to the loss of interest in the Cardinal case. For example, 4000 people came out to a rally against violent crime in response to the Danelesko case (*4,000 rally in anger,* 1994) but there was no rally sparked by the Cardinal case. The issues of multiple stigmatization and marginalization that arose in the Cardinal case appear far from unique. People with disabilities are more likely to be members of ethnic minorities and are much more likely to be poor.

Cases like the killing of Joyce Cardinal and Kyle Velasquez or the shooting of Mark Kintgen raise questions about how the press handles violence against people with disabilities. It has been suggested that news media have ignored an epidemic of crime against people with developmental disabilities (Phillips & Project Censored, 2001) and some research suggests that victim characteristics play a powerful role in whether and how crimes are reported by news media (Chermak, 1995).

About this Thesis

I have two main goals in writing this thesis. First, I attempt to construct a preliminary description of patterns of homicide as it affects homicide victims with developmental disabilities. Second, I attempt to provide some analysis of the media coverage of one high profile case.

This is a "paper-format thesis," which means three chapters in the thesis are research papers prepared for potential publication. Each of these has its own brief introduction, review of literature, description of method, results, and discussion. Since each of these chapters is written as a "stand-alone" article, some of the information in the introduction and literature review in any one of the three may duplicate information contained in one or both of the others. Each of these chapters provides a brief report of results limited in length and scope to that of an article. Some additional discussion of the findings is included in chapter five.

In this first introductory chapter, a general introduction to the topic and why it is of interest is provided. In addition, some supplemental information about procedures and methodological issues related to those procedures that cannot be included in the individual "paper" chapters due to limits on their length are included.

The second chapter, "Homicides of People with Developmental Disabilities: An Analysis of News Stories," is a preliminary descriptive study of the facts and patterns described in news stories about homicides involving victims with developmental disabilities. It includes information on 1128 cases of homicide.

In the third chapter, "Intrafamilial Homicide of People with Developmental Disabilities," more detailed information about 308 cases, in which family members were implicated in the homicide of an individual with a developmental disability is provided. Like the previous chapter, this study is focused primarily on objective data rather than the attitudes and opinions expressed.

In the fourth chapter, "Portrayals of People with Cerebral Palsy in Homicide News," the ways in which homicide victims with developmental disabilities are portrayed by news media is considered. This study goes beyond simple description of what is presented as objective facts in the news and looks at indicators of bias by the media presenting the story.

The fifth and final chapter, "Discussion & Conclusion," provides some additional analysis and implications of the findings of the three studies. This includes some informal, quantitative and qualitative micro-content analysis of the findings of chapter five.

Violence and Disability

Violence against people with disabilities has been a topic of increasing interest to researchers during the last two decades. While some links had been identified between disabilities and violence prior to the 1980s (e.g., von Hentig, 1948; Elmer & Gregg, 1967; Sandgrund, Gaines, & Green, 1974), the apparent link between violence and disability was generally treated as an anecdotal finding in research and focussed on other aspects of child abuse or adult violence. During the 1980s and 1990s, a number of researchers focused more specifically on this link. For example, Longo and Gochenour (1981) described 11 cases of individuals with disabilities who had been sexually assaulted. In 1982, Frisch and Rhoads reported that child maltreatment histories were 3.5 times as common among children referred for learning problems as among children with no known learning problems. Diamond and Jaudes (1983) reported on 17 children with cerebral palsy who were also victims of child abuse. They concluded that there was a strong association between cerebral palsy and abuse. In almost half of the 17 cases, the cerebral palsy appeared to have resulted from violence, but in the other nine children abuse seemed to have started after the child was diagnosed. By the end of the 1980s, Canadian researchers reported that, in spite of the limitations of small-scale studies, the consistency of findings across studies left little doubt that children with disabilities were more frequently sexually abused than other children (Sobsey & Varnhagen, 1988).

After 1990, the links between many varieties of violence and disability became considerably clearer. In 1991, Sobsey and Doe published information on 166 cases of sexual assault of adults with disabilities and sexual abuse of children with disabilities. That same year Sullivan, Brookhouser, Scanlan, and Knutson (1991) published similar information on 482 cases of sexual, physical, emotional abuse or neglect involving children with disabilities. These studies shed light on the patterns of abuse, such as the relationships of offenders to victims, how the abuse was discovered, and the effects of the abuse on these children. In 1992, Wilson and Brewer published data on crime victimisation rates of adults with developmental disabilities in Australia and reported rates for various categories of violent crime that were several times higher than those experienced by Australians without disabilities. Women with developmental disabilities were subjected to sexual assault at a rate 12.7 times as high as were women without disabilities. In 1993, the largest and best-controlled study to date published results from a nationally representative sample of U.S. child-abuse-reporting districts (Crosse, Kaye, & Ratnofsky, 1993). The authors found that, while children with disabilities experienced abuse at least 1.7 times as frequently as other children did, methodological limitations suggested this figure was probably a very low estimate. This research base continued to develop through the 1990s.

By the year 2000, Sullivan and Knutson had published a cohort study of more than 50,000 children with and without disabilities in Omaha. The method used in this study overcame many of the limitations from previous studies. The results indicated that children with a variety of disabilities were more than three times as likely as children without disabilities to experience maltreatment. For example, children with intellectual disabilities were 3.7 times as likely to experience neglect, 3.8 times as likely to experience physical abuse, 3.8 times as likely to experience emotional abuse, and 4.0 times as likely to experience sexual abuse.

While individual studies provided more pieces of the puzzle, models were also being developed that suggested how these pieces might fit together. Much of the early professional child-maltreatment literature assumed that the higher rates of abuse experienced by children with disabilities were related to increased caregiver stress associated with the demands of raising a child with a disability. This same dependency-stress hypothesis was sometimes presented as an explanation for elder abuse. It was assumed that, as people aged, increasing disability and dependency resulted in more demands on caregivers and these demands produced more stress for caregivers. In turn, increased stress was seen as the critical factor increasing violence. While this hypothesis was widely accepted, there was little research to support it. When the hypothesis was finally tested, the results failed to provide support. Pillemer and Finkelhor (1989) found that dependency levels of elders had no relationship to the probability of abuse by caregivers. Similarly, Benedict Wulff, and White (1992) found that levels of parental stress had almost no value in predicting abuse of children with severe and multiple disabilities.

Psychosocial behavioral models, such as the integrated ecological model (Sobsey, 1994) and the multifactorial model described by Petersilia, Foote, & Crowell (2001) replaced the dependency-stress hypothesis. These models present violence as an interaction between an offender and a victim within the context of a relationship that is determined in part by a greater social, cultural, and political context. The social construction of roles (e.g., parent, disabled child, special-education teacher, therapist, institutional attendant) and relationships (e.g., parent-child, teacher-student, therapist-client, attendant-resident) are determined in part by the attitudes and beliefs of our culture.

News Coverage of Violence Against People with Disabilities

The importance given to cultural attitudes and beliefs in this model has particular relevance to the analysis of media portrayals of people with disabilities in general and specifically to the media portrayals of people with disabilities as victims of crime. The attitudes and beliefs expressed in news media both reflect the general attitudes and beliefs of our culture and help to shape those attitudes and beliefs. While it is clearly beyond the power of the media to radically change the attitudes and beliefs of any society, the money spent each year on media advertising strongly suggests the power of the media to influence emotions, ideas, and behaviour. For example, in one study, pre-existing beliefs about unidentified flying objects (UFOs) were major determinants of how people responded to news stories on the topic. Nevertheless, news stories did have a significant influence on their beliefs about UFOs, and the manner in which the stories were reported was an important determiner of the degree of influence (Sparks & Pellechia, 1998).

It is interesting to note that the power of the news media to influence attitudes and beliefs about UFOs may be greater because very few individuals report extensive personal experience with UFOs. As a result, the public is more dependent upon indirect accounts, particularly those that are published or broadcast to form their opinions. The media's ability to influence beliefs about the existence of something with which most of us have considerable experience (e.g., dogs or bicycles) may be much more limited. The average citizen's dependence on the news media to act as an extension of his or her senses in specific domains of experience may increase the power of the news media to influence attitudes and beliefs in those domains. For most citizens, violent crime, particularly homicide, is one of those domains. Each year, only about 20 people out of each million Canadians become victims of homicides, yet most Canadians will encounter 1000s of stories about homicide cases each year through the news media. As a result, while official statistics suggest that Canada's homicide rates are at their lowest levels in three decades and continue to decline, most Canadians are unaware of this decline and many believe that the homicide rate is rising sharply (Desbarats, 2000).

The relative rarity of direct experience with homicide is compounded in regard to homicide of individuals with developmental disabilities. Only about 1% to 3% of Canadians have developmental disabilities. Thus, if people with developmental disabilities became victims of homicide at the same rate as the general population, we would expect less than one case per each million of general population each year or 6-18 cases in total each year.

One of the principal ways that analysts believe that the news media exert influence is through agenda setting. The media may exercise this agenda-setting role through editorial decisions about what to include or exclude, regardless of whether the story content is neutral or biased. Thus, by keeping the "media spotlight" on homicide and other violent crime, violence is kept on the political and social agenda regardless of what the media has to say about these phenomena (McCombs, 1997). It appears that it is for this reason that government and advocacy groups have learned to seek media coverage as a means to keep issues on the social and political agenda.

The power of the media to set the social and political agenda is limited to a range determined by existing public opinion. The prominence given to violent crime in the media may be difficult to arbitrarily replace with another topic unless there was an existing public appetite for the new topic. The editorial policies of news media appear to be determined, to a great extent, by what the public wants and is willing to accept. While homicide stories are given a great deal of prominence, characteristics of the homicide victims seem to be among the determinants of which cases receive publicity. Age, gender, socio-economic status, and race of victims appear to play a role in determining which homicide stories are considered worthy of reporting and how much coverage they will be given (Sorenson, Peterson Manz, & Berk, 1998).

Violence against people with disabilities has had sporadic coverage in the news media, and is generally considered to be a topic of limited interest to the public. One indicator of the relative lack of coverage of this topic is its inclusion in the *Censored 2001* yearbook as one of the most underreported media stories for the year 2000 (Phillips, 2001; Roth, 2001). Over the last 25 years, Project Censored, a group of 89 experts in Journalism and over 100 journalism interns, has selected 25 news stories each year that they consider to be of national significance but that the mainstream press has ignored, refused to report, or de-emphasised. Noam Chomsky (2001), a well-known media critic, in his introduction to *Censored 2001*, suggests, "media service to the corporate sector is reflexive" (p. 25) and that the media generally serve "elite sectors" (p. 29) of society. In Chomsky's rather pessimistic view of the mainstream media, there appears to be such widespread underreporting of important stories that do not fit with the corporate agenda of the media that picking only 25 per year becomes almost a random process.

While the Project Censored staff is almost exclusively from the United States, the stories that are identified are often global in nature and many of the news sources identified are international media. For example, the highest rated, underreported story in Censored 2001 was "World Bank and multinational corporations seek to privatize water"(p. 39) and the primary source was an article by Maude Barlow *in Canadian Dimension.*

Dan Sorenson's (2000) "The invisible victims," which describes high rates of crimes against people with disabilities, was included as the 20th most underreported story of the year 2000. In an update to the original story Sorenson (2001) again points out:

> The press and the media continue to largely ignore this issue. I know of only three significant stories on this issue over the last ten years. Most reports describe isolated crimes with no hint that there is a large, serious, and persistent pattern of violence directed toward people with disabilities. (p. 95)

A few of the descriptions of isolated crimes that Sorenson described have received massive media coverage. For example, the 1992 trial of a group of high-school athletes from well-to-do families for the sexual assault of a 17-year-old female student who had an intellectual disability was the subject of hundreds of news stories. Bernard Lefkowitz, a professor of Journalism at Columbia University, wrote a particularly compelling series of articles for the Long Island's *Newsday* (e.g., Lefkowitz, 1992) that were subsequently compiled and edited into a popular book, *Our Guys* (Lefkowitz, 1997) and later into a television movie of the same name for the ABC network.

The Glen Ridge rape trial story was characterized by controversy regarding victimization, that fuelled the media interest. Many people in New Jersey considered the real victims to be the young men who raped a seventeen-year-old girl with a miniature baseball bat and a broomstick while their friends looked on and cheered. The defence arguments were extreme and almost anachronistic in their attempts to portray the victim as the real sexual predator, the offenders as good kids, and rape as an amusing prank.

The defence portrayed the victim as asking to be sexually assaulted and invited the jury to assume that her intellectual disability somehow was responsible for her sexual excess. Defence lawyer Michael Querques suggested to the jury, " You may very well find, in the condition she [the victim] had, her feeling for sex and her drive, her genitals' signals, are greater than normal" (quoted in Laufer, 1994, p. 51). Querques also dismissed his clients' behavior to the jury as follows: "Boys will be boys. Pranksters. Fool-arounds. Do crazy things. Experiment with life, and disregard their parents. Boys will be boys" (quoted in Laufer, 1994, p. 69). The defence seemed determined to convince the jury that a seventeen-year-old sexually aggressive woman with an IQ of 49 had somehow outsmarted 11good-hearted but playful high-school athletes into taking her into a basement and penetrating her with baseball bat and broomstick for her own selfish reasons. While the initial reactions of some fellow high-school students and many adult members of the Glen Ridge community may have suggested that such an argument could have been acceptable to a jury, the arguments seemed almost laughable to most observers in 1992. It was, at least in part, the outrageousness of this defence that gave the press a story of great public interest.

Perhaps there was a deeper sub-text to this defence. Perhaps the real intent was even more basic. Perhaps it's underlying message is that these young men, regardless of whatever offences they might commit, are part of us, and this young woman, regardless of how she may have been treated, is an alien, a deviant unworthy of our protection. Research has typically shown that whether an individual identities with the victim or the perpetrator of a crime influences whether or not that individual believes the crime is justified. For example, Miller, Rossi, and Simpson (1986) asked people to evaluate the seriousness of crimes and the appropriateness of sentences. People considered crimes to be more serious if the crime victim was the same race and gender as the individual rating the crime and sentence. Similarly, Hunter, Stringer and Watson (1991) found that Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants both believed that violence was justified when committed by members of their own religion against the other but unjustified when the identical crime was committed against members of their own group by the other. Applying these findings, if jurors or members of the public could be made to identify with the middle-class young men who committed this crime against someone who seemed to be an outsider, the justification might be accepted, no matter how absurd.

Some might suggest that the defence's tactic in the Glen Ridge rape trial was partially successful since many of the original charges did not lead to convictions. Nevertheless, the jury convicted three young men of sexual assault and sent them to prison. The three were sent to prison in 1997 after a series of appeals and the first was released on parole in 1999. A fourth, convicted only of conspiracy was given probation (McGraw, 1999). While many believed the sentences to be light for a serious crime, they were fairly typical for first-time sexual assault convictions.

Homicides involving victims with developmental disabilities, particularly children with developmental disabilities, have sometimes received considerable media attention, particularly when the defence formally or informally suggests that killing the child may have been understandable, justifiable, or even heroic because of the unusual circumstances related to the child's disability. Two basic versions of this rationale have been suggested in many different cases.

First, the experience of parenting a child with a disability is described as being so stressful and devastating to the parent that the parent cracks under the unbearable strain. The act is not considered justifiable or heroic, but it is considered to be understandable, an irrational act committed under unique circumstances. Might such an act simply be forgiven and forgotten. This question was explored in great detail by former New York Times and Wall Street Journal writer Nancy Salamon in her book *Facing the wind: A true story of tragedy and reconciliation* (2000). She presents the case of Robert Rowe, a Brooklyn lawyer who murdered his multiply handicapped son, two other children, and his wife with a baseball bat in 1978. Rowe's defence argued that he was depressed to the point of psychosis and that his child's disability was a major factor in his depression. He was found not criminally responsible by reason of mental defect, spent a relatively short time in a psychiatric hospital and emerged to found a new family. Salamon raises the question of whether Rowe was a victim of circumstance or manipulator of circumstances, but she does not attempt to answer the question. She attempts to present the facts and allows her readers to decide, although some have suggested that she has been too soft on Rowe.

The second rationale suggests that the child is suffering and only death can end the suffering. Thus, unlike the former case, homicide is portrayed as rational, and justifiable or even heroic. Canadian press coverage of the trials and appeals of Robert Latimer for the murder of his daughter Tracy provides an excellent example. Canadian news media printed and broadcast thousands of stories about this Saskatchewan farmer who killed his twelve-year-old daughter who had cerebral palsy. His lawyers defended him, claiming that the homicide was a justifiable mercy killing that was motivated by compassion and the desire to spare his daughter from further pain and suffering.

It is more difficult to characterize the press coverage of other cases of homicide involving people with developmental disabilities. For example, some of the more than 50 women who disappeared from the streets of Vancouver in what is now believed to be Canada's largest serial killing string had developmental disabilities, but that appeared to be only one of many attributes that led to the marginalization of these women. Similarly, most of the victims of the man who now appears to have been France's most prolific serial killer had developmental disabilities (Lichfield, 2000). A Montana attempted murder trial scheduled for October, 2002, involves a defendant suspected in the disappearances of young women with developmental disabilities across the United States (Tuttle, 2002). In spite of these cases, however, there has been little research on homicide and developmental disability.

Research on Homicide and Developmental Disability

Researchers have studied the relationships between many varieties of violence (e.g., child abuse, domestic violence, institutional abuse, sexual assault, spousal abuse) and disability. Nevertheless, homicide, typically considered to be the most extreme form of violence, has been largely ignored in studying violence against people with disabilities (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, in press). While research literature and media accounts acknowledge that people with developmental disabilities (PWDD) are being killed (Sobsey, Wells, Lucardie, & Mansell, 1995), no formal analysis of the characteristics of these homicides or their presentation in the media, has been conducted.

According to the Crime classification manual (Douglass, Burgess, Burgess, & Ressler, 1992), homicide is a broad term that describes any killing of one person by another. It includes both criminal and non-criminal acts of commission or omission, and it can be intentional or accidental. The Criminal Code of Canada classifies homicide as culpable, including murder, manslaughter, or infanticide, or not culpable, such as self-defence (Rodrigues, 2000). Criminologists typically classify criminal homicides by victim characteristics (e.g., age, relationship to perpetrator, socio-economic status, number), motivations (e.g., economic gain, elimination of a witness, revenge), and patterns (e.g., mass murder, serial murder). A homicidal event describes an episode at one time or location. Some events include more than one victim and research on homicidal events also may include attempted homicides.

Homicide has been the subject of significant research interest. Dissertation Abstracts (UMI-ProQuest, 2002) lists 434 dissertations that include homicide as a keyword published in the 20 year period between 1982 and 2001. The number of studies about homicide increased 172% (using five-year averages) from the beginning to the end of that period, almost double the general increase (93%) in the number of theses published each year for the same period. Many recent studies have examined the characteristics of homicide in society (Chermak, 1995; Fedorowycz, 2000; Richards, 2000; Sorenson, Peterson Manz, & Berk, 1998).

Currently, Statistics Canada data on homicides in Canada do not include information on the disability status of victims, such as mental disorders as defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2000) or mental retardation, pervasive developmental disorders, and developmental disabilities as defined by Kiernan and Schalock (1995). Only recently has the U.S. National Crime Survey included questions on whether the victim has a disability or not (Petersilia, Foote, & Crowell, 2001). The importance of this type of information and research is evident when one examines the risks of physical abuse, sexual abuse, assault, crime victimization, sterilization, refusal of medical treatment, euthanasia, and mercy killing associated with being developmentally disabled (Sobsey, 1994).

A few studies suggest that people with developmental disabilities may be at a high risk for homicide. For example, a Japanese study reports on a series of 24 autopsies conducted on people with cerebral palsy. Homicide was established as the cause of death in six (25%) of the twenty-four cases (Bunai, Komoriya, & Ohya, 1988). While 24 cases obviously represent a very small sample, 25% is an extremely high proportion. For example, the percentage is significantly lower for active duty military personnel, a group of healthy young adults considered at high risk for homicide. Among American active duty combat troops between 1990 through 1993, only 5% of deaths were due to homicides, including 2% combat and 3% other homicides (Helmkamp & Kennedy, 1996). De Haan reported on 934 cases of child abuse from Oregon. Of the 934 cases, 42 resulted in deaths. Of the 42 children who were died, 40 (95.2%) of those who were killed had a documented history of a physical, mental, or behavioral disability prior to death compared with 9 – 11% that would be expected at random.

Non-Culpable Homicides

While culpable or criminal homicide is the subject of most homicide research, it is important to remember that the line between culpable and justifiable homicide is culturally and politically determined. For example, the killing of children and adults with disabilities had widespread social acceptance and was decriminalised by executive order in Nazi Germany (Burleigh, 1994). The role of German physicians, nurses, and other medical staff in the euthanization of children and adults with developmental disabilities during the Third Reich has been well-documented (Burleigh, 1994; Gallagher, 1990; Mitscherlich & Mielke, 1962; Proctor, 1988, 1992). Germany's Aktion T-4 program ultimately resulted in the euthanasia and cremation of tens of thousands of children and adults with developmental disabilities residing in mental institutions and hospitals (Gallagher, 1990). In 1939, prior to Aktion T-4, the German Reich committee made registration of infants with developmental and physical disabilities compulsory for physicians and midwives. Any infants so registered were admitted to clinics where they died as a result of starvation, disease, or drug overdose (Burleigh, 1994). Compulsory registration was predated by Germany's 1933, "*Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Posterity*" which permitted the euthanasia of people deemed inferior (Mitscherlich & Mielke, 1962, p. 233). The German euthanasia program was preceded by a movement to sterilize PWDD, which was seen as a means to ensure that "inferiors" would not reproduce inferior children, hence placing a burden on the economy (Hume, 1991). An estimated 300,000 special education students and institutionalized German adults were eventually sterilized (Sengstock, Magerhans-Hurley, & Sprotte, 1990).

The several government sponsored euthanasia programs that followed were responsible for approximate 275,000 non-culpable homicides during the war years. They also developed the equipment (e.g., gas vans, gas chambers disguised as showers, massive crematoria), procedures (e.g., isolation, depersonalization), and personnel (i.e., in 1941, the major euthanasia program was disbanded and the personnel were redeployed to set up the death camps of eastern Europe). While these acts were decriminalised at the time they took place, the post war medical trials declared them "crimes against humanity." At least a few of the perpetrators were tried and hanged.

In a more contemporary clash of cultures and political systems, Human Rights Watch (1996) condemned China for the intentional homicides of large numbers of children with disabilities. In response, China claimed that it had been singled out unfairly. Their defenders pointed out that Western countries, such as the United States, Canada, and England also routinely kill large numbers of infants with disabilities. For example, Wall and Partridge (1997) reported that a large majority of infants dying in the intensive care unit died because a decision was made to withdraw life-sustaining treatment or discontinue nutrition. While many of these intentional homicides ended lives of children who could not have been kept alive indefinitely with treatment, about 20% of all deaths were intentional decisions to end lives of infants that had long-term viability. They were killed because they were considered to lack potential quality of life because of the likelihood of severe disability. While these findings supported the Chinese notion, that the Western Nations that joined Human Rights Watch in condemning China were exercising a double standard, they did not reveal anything that was previously unknown or different from previous reports. For example, Duff and Campbell (1973) reported similar infanticides in neonatal intensive care nurseries more than two decades earlier. Some pro-life and human rights groups argue that there is no legal distinction between the events in these cases and other killings prosecuted as murder or intentional manslaughter. Society, however, generally accepts the killing of such infants as justifiable rather than culpable homicides as long as death is achieved by withholding care, which may include withholding medicine, surgery, treatments (e.g., suctioning), nutrition, or hydration.

The killing of children in neonatal intensive care nurseries through active means (e.g., lethal injection) remains much more controversial. It is typically considered to be culpable homicide, yet in practice there appears to be little will to prosecute these acts. For example, a nursing assistant in the Netherlands euthanized a patient with mental retardation, whose health was deteriorating. The nursing assistant was convicted of murder but was sentenced to one year in jail (Leenen, 1989). In 1995, Dr. Henk Prins of the Netherlands was acquitted for euthanizing an infant diagnosed with hydrocephalus, spina bifida, and brain injury. The request for euthanasia was made by the infant's parents (Huibers, 1995).

In an Alberta case, a routine review of records revealed that an infant who died in hospital had received a dose of narcotics 25-50 times the maximum dose for her weight 40 minutes before she died in the Fall of 1983. The parents had been told that their baby had died of natural causes. An inquest did not establish homicide as a cause of death, suggesting that since the infant's health status was extremely fragile, she might have died before the massive narcotic dose killed her. Alberta prosecutors stated they were prepared to prosecute but indicated that the physician, who had left Canada, could not be extradited. The actual resolve to prosecute, however, was questionable because the nurse who administered the medication and who was aware that it was a massive overdose was never charged. Her professional association suspended her from practising nursing for six months (Cresswell, 1983).

Public opinion on the case was clearly split. Many people felt that the doctor and nurses had done the right thing. After all, they could have protected themselves by simply waiting for the baby to die of natural causes. Others felt that the only thing that the health-care providers had done wrong was that they had failed to discuss the matter with the baby's parents. Still others, however, felt that, regardless of the actual cause of death, giving a lethal injection to a baby was both unethical and criminal.

The lack of agreement about such cases is often apparent among members of the health care team as well as the general public. When three nurses reported a physician for allegedly giving a lethal injection to a nine-year-old girl with serious health problems, the physician's hospital privileges were suspended for 90 days, but no criminal charges followed. The hospital administration also suspended the three nurses without pay for breaking the silence and reporting the infraction (Wallace, 1995).

Many parents have also justified their acts of homicide as acts of mercy. Sixteen-year-old Ryan Wilkieson was killed by his mother, in a murder-suicide, by means of carbon monoxide poisoning. Both mother and son were found dead in the family car. In a suicide note, the mother stated that she was too tired to go on. Ryan had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy (LaSalle, 1995). In a murder-attempted suicide, six-year-old Charles Antoine was drowned in the bathtub by his mother, who had slashed her wrists afterwards. In her suicide note, Ms. Danielle Blais, Charles' mother, criticized her son's school for not understanding her son's behavioral problems. Charles had been diagnosed with autism (Corelli, 1998). Robert Latimer claimed he killed his daughter Tracy, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, to prevent her suffering (The Calgary Herald, October 26, 1997; Woodward, 1998).

Other homicides of people with developmental disabilities seem unrelated to issues of perceived mercy. In Edmonton, Alberta, Paul Devereaux, a 24-year-old man with a developmental disability, was tortured and beaten over a period of several days by one adult and three youths who had befriended him. One of the assailants, who had been court ordered to perform community service, had been working with Mr. Devereaux as a wheelchair porter at an extended care facility. Mr. Devereaux died as a result of his injuries. One of the assailants received jail time, while two others received only probation and community work (Coulter, 1990; Engman, 1992).

Still other homicides involve strangers killing PWDD. In these cases, a stranger or distant acquaintance commonly befriends the person with a developmental disability, generally for the purpose of meeting the needs of the perpetrator. For example, in Philadelphia, Gary Heidnik was convicted of the rape, torture, and murder of several women with mental retardation. It was noted that this self-proclaimed minister frequently waited for his victims in a van parked across from a large institution. His ministry had predominantly served community members with disabilities (Englade, 1988). Amy Robinson, a 19-year-old woman diagnosed with Turner's Syndrome, was used as target practice by two men who shot her with a pellet gun and crossbow, before killing her with a rifle shot. One of the men had worked with Ms. Robinson at the local grocery store. It was reported that Ms. Robinson was abducted on her way to work. The young men who committed this crime also claimed, at one point, that they too acted compassionately to end Amy Robinson's suffering. Nevertheless, no one seemed ready to believe that the prolonged torture of a young women who was not previously experiencing any obvious pain or suffering was an act of mercy ("Texas man sentenced to die for torture killing," 1998; "Two men on trial charged with killing a woman they used for target practice," 1998).

In Pennsylvania, classmates who thought it would be fun to hang someone murdered 15-year-old Kimmy Jo Dots. Kimmy, who had mental retardation, had been invited by a classmate for a sleep over (The death of innocence, 1999). In Tokyo, Japan, the mutilated head of Jun Hase was found in a schoolyard, with his eyes missing and mouth slit open. Jun was an 11-year-old boy diagnosed with mental retardation. His killer was a 14-year-old junior high school boy from the same school. In a letter written to police, the perpetrator expressed his hatred for the high-pressured Japanese education system (Sakurai, 1997). O'Shaughnessy (1994) reported on the human organ transplant trade involving children with disabilities. The author suggested that orphaned East European children with disabilities were being adopted to supply the organ transplant trade, provided that their vital organs were healthy.

Method and Methodology

The general method used in this thesis is content analysis, and more specifically it can be described primarily as *quantitative content analysis* and as *macro-content analysis*. *Quantitative content analysis* counts the occurrences of words, phrases, concepts, or other elements that fall into pre-determined categories to describe attributes of group of narratives, in this case news stories. These can be used to simply describe content or to compare content from different sources, times, or subsets of data (Carly, 1990). *Macro-content analysis* refers to the broad analysis of a large sample of narratives as opposed to a more detailed analysis of a smaller sample. The method used in this study can also be described as computer-assisted content analysis, since it relies heavily on databases both to identify the news stories that are included and, in some instances, to identify if specific words or phrases appear in stories. (Solomon, 1993). While these methods allow the identification and analysis of a very large body of material, they also impose some limitations (Zollars, 1994). For example, electronic databases that include full-text news stories are still evolving and becoming more comprehensive. As a result, almost any phenomenon studied would appear to increase over the last two decades if one used the number recorded in these databases on a year-by-year basis as an indication of the number of actual stories filed. The primary reason for selecting this broad, macro-analysis approach was the concern that many, perhaps most stores about homicide victims with developmental disabilities would receive only local coverage. While a small number of cases might receive national or even international coverage, the very characteristics of the cases that made them of national importance might also differentiate them from stories deemed less worthy of the same level of media attention.

In general, the method employed here is similar to the method used by Richards (2000) in her study, *The loss of innocents: Child killers and their victims,* and was chosen for the same reason, its value in identifying and describing patterns in a large number of cases. Richards' study analysed patterns and characteristics of homicides from news stories describing 833 cases of child homicides. Our study of homicide victims with developmental disabilities identified over 1200 cases. Some cases had only one news story, but many had dozens of stories about the same case, a few had hundreds, and one had well over 2000 stories on a single case. As result, over 9,000 news articles were identified for this study. Researchers coded 67 variables for each story, but some variables could not be coded for some cases because not all stories included information on all variables.

The use of news media as a source of this kind of data has some important limitations. Unlike official databases kept by law enforcement agencies or Statistics Canada, there is no set of rules and definitions in place to ensure relative uniformity of data. This has the potential to produce variability in the data and could produce systematic bias in the data if editorial policies and other related factors facilitated the inclusion of certain cases in the news media and the exclusion of others. Nevertheless, since there is no more reliable database available to identify relevant cases, the extraction of cases from news media represents a valuable first step toward a tentative description of this phenomenon. This tentative description may provide a rationale for the development of more reliable data sources from which future researchers will be able to provide more valid descriptions of the phenomenon. In addition, it should be remembered that since homicide is typically a covert behavior, even the most rigorously controlled data sources might have systematic distortions in them. For example, many experts believe that, among the large number of sudden unexplained infant deaths, about 10% are actually the result of homicides. However, these cases are not included among those in Statistics Canada or law enforcement databases, because the cause of death cannot be clearly identified as homicide.

The first two studies in this thesis provide information on the personal characteristics of both PWDD and those implicated in their death. Focus is given to general demographics regarding gender and age of PWDD, their relationship to those implicated in their death, the most common acts causing death, and charges against, and conviction of those implicated in their homicide. Discussion focuses on media presentation of homicide, theories of aggression and violence, child abuse, homicide, and factors associated with discrimination against PWDD. Preventative measures will be discussed in terms of screening potential caregivers, and personal, environmental, and societal factors placing PWDD at risk for abuse and discrimination. The third study provides information on the Canadian media's use of bias in language in describing PWCP. Discussion focuses on self-categorization theory, media effect, distance theory, and factors associated with discrimination against PWCP.

Research information was obtained through several online services providing full text news articles on homicides of PWDD. The same research method was used for all three studies, but adapted to suit the specific focus of each study. Content analysis was used to examine the information obtained. The strength of content analysis is that it allows one to collect and analyze a large amount of information over a short period, without being intrusive in the lives of relatives of those who have been killed, or those implicated in the deaths of PWDD. Longitudinal research is also made possible by this method, allowing one to study a topic of interest across several decades (Babbie, 1999).

A weakness of content analysis is its dependence on recorded communication, which may be subjective (Babbie, 1999). The accuracy and objectivity of information can, in part, be evaluated by the existence of conflicting information about similar events. Because of the advantages that the breadth of a large news database offers, it is worthwhile to proceed on the assumption that the information it provides is relatively accurate.

Research on other forms of violence and on homicide in different populations suggests that age and gender may be important variables to consider. Sobsey, Randall, and Parrila (1997), in their study of gender differences in abused children with and without disabilities, found that more abused children with disabilities were boys than were girls. In their study on fatal child abuse in the United States Air Force, Lucas, Wezner, Milner et al. (2002) determined that younger victims were more likely to have had a history of physical abuse prior to their deaths. With children with disabilities more at risk for abuse, especially boys, it is surmised that they may also be more at risk for being victim to the most severe form of physical abuse, homicide.

The findings described in chapters two through four, while subject to limitations, provide new insights into the characteristics of homicides of PWDD and the media's presentation of these acts. Future hypotheses based on media research, media effect, homicide, discrimination of PWDD, and prevention will hopefully follow. Further research is necessary to further confirm, with confidence, the findings from these studies, and contribute to our understanding of the vulnerabilities of PWDD within our society.

News Media Analysis

Content analysis of news media has been used in two different ways. First, descriptive content analysis of factual information in news stories has been used to generate preliminary descriptions of phenomena that are presumed to represent an approximation of objective reality (Nuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). Descriptive content analysis is particularly useful to describe categories of events that have been described individually in news media but have not been comprehensively researched or recorded in well-controlled databases. Second, content analysis can be used to identify attitudes, opinions, and biases of authors or publications (Nuendorf, 2002; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

Two important limitations of the use of news media to describe a phenomenon are: (1) sampling and (2) accuracy. Sampling is a concern because the mere occurrence of an event is not sufficient to ensure that it will appear in print or the electronic media. Only those events known to and deemed newsworthy by the media are included. Because the selection of newsworthy material is systematic rather than random, it inevitably results in a distortion of the resulting description. For example, if news stories were used as a basis for describing motor vehicle accidents, it would create the impression that a much larger percentage resulted in serious injuries, deaths, and major property damage. This would result because most minor traffic accidents would not be included among published news stories and, therefore, would be left out of the analysis. Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk (1998), for example, found that many urban homicides are not reported in the news media. Whether and how much a case was reported was systematically related to case characteristics including gender, age, and socioeconomic status of the victims.

Accuracy is also a limitation of using published data as a basis for describing objective reality. While news media typically attempt to ensure that they have reported facts correctly, errors and omissions occur. Because there is no simple and systematic way of testing the reliability of news reports, it is difficult to estimate how much this limitation may be affecting the results of a study. In addition, differences in the way terms may be defined and used may further limit accuracy. For example, as used in various news stories, *intellectual impairment, learning disability, mental handicap,* and *developmental disability* all refer to the same disability. As used in other news stories, these same terms refer to distinctly separate disabilities. In many cases, the context of the story helps clarify the category of disability intended by the author, but in others, context provides little or no help.

In spite of these limitations, content analysis of news stories is considered as a good source for initial descriptive studies of a phenomenon, including various forms of homicide. In the previously mentioned Richards (2000) study, for example, quantitative analysis of newspaper stories were used to provide a preliminary description of the patterns of child homicide in 833 cases that included at least 992 perpetrators and 1,098 homicide victims who were younger than thirteen years old. Richards found that, by identifying a large number of cases and a large number of articles about these cases, some of the limitations regarding sampling and accuracy could be overcome. In addition, she found a major strength of using newspaper stories as opposed to other available data was that the narrative nature of the stories ensured that variables were discussed in context, allowing a better understanding of interactions among various factors.

Recent examination of media representation of persons with disabilities has focused on how print media frames disability. Haller's (2000) content analysis of media coverage of the 1990 American Disabilities Act (ADA) concluded, in part, that coverage often included misrepresentations contributing to the perceived backlash against the ADA. In their examination of major Canadian and Israeli newspapers, Auslander and Gold (1999) concluded that the media's use of terminology referring to persons with disability was, for the majority, insensitive or disabling. The authors found that Canadian journalists more frequently used the term "victim" in referring to people with disabilities then their Israeli counterparts. The authors concluded that, despite Canadian newspaper style guides that set standards for appropriate and desirable terminology for writing about people with disabilities, these standards are often ignored.

Summary

Although there has been considerable study of violence against people with disabilities in general and more specifically against people with developmental disabilities, there has been little study of homicides committed against people with developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, the law enforcement and Statistics Canada databases commonly used to study homicide record no information about disability status of homicide victims. This thesis provides a preliminary study of homicides of people with developmental disabilities based on content analysis of news stories.

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Running head: MEDIA COVERAGE OF HOMICIDES

Chapter II

Homicides of People with Developmental Disabilities: An Analysis of News Stories

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The research described in this study was conducted with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. [Award no. 752-98-1229]. The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities provided additional support for this project through a sub-grant from Temple University's Institute on Disability. The opinions expressed in this study represent only those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funding agencies.

Abstract

Over the past decade, there has been increased interest in crimes against people with developmental disabilities (PWDD). While national and international information has been available on homicides of people in general, little attention has been given to homicides of PWDD specifically. This paper provides a preliminary description of homicides as they affect PWDD. Through content analysis, 1128 media cases of homicides of PWDD involving 1967 deaths were examined. Seven groups implicated in these deaths were identified: acquaintances, caregivers, family members, government representatives, roommates, strangers, and those who could not be identified given the information provided. For those PWDD who could be identified by age and gender, the majority killed were male and four years of age or younger. Individuals responsible for the deaths of PWDD were predominantly male, with the exception of the Family group. The deaths of PWDD primarily resulted from neglect, burns, beatings, shootings, and asphyxia. Discussion examines media presentation of homicides, research on homicide, models of violence and aggression, and prevention.

Homicides of People with Developmental Disabilities: An Analysis of News Stories

"From a distance, I can deny your humanity; and from a distance, I cannot hear your screams" (Grossman, 1995, p.102). Lieutenant Colonel Grossman wrote this about soldiers' emotional desensitisation when required to kill. Grossman explained that to be able to kill, one must achieve a psychological distance from one's opponent. Distancing oneself from another may be accomplished through physical, cultural, moral, social, or mechanical means. By viewing others as different from us, by marginalizing people, it becomes easier to commit violence against them.

One group of people who have been marginalized in society is people with developmental disabilities (PWDD). Being marginalized, some PWDD have experienced forced sterilization, denial of medical treatment, involuntary medical experimentation, mercy killing, euthanasia, physical and sexual abuse, neglect and homicide (Sobsey, 1994; Sobsey, Wells, Lucardie, & Mansell, 1995; Williams, 1995). Research has shown that adults and children with developmental disabilities are at greater risk for being sexually and physically abused (Galey & Pugh, 1995; Sobsey, Randall, & Parrila, 1997; Sobsey & Varnhagen, 1991). Some researchers have suggested that children with disabilities are at a risk 1.8 times greater for physical abuse, and 1.6 times greater for sexual abuse, than children without disabilities (Crosse, Kaye, & Ratnofsky, 1993). Other studies place the relative risks even higher. According to Sullivan and Knutson (1997), children with disabilities are 3.44 times as likely to be abused then children without disabilities.

The incidence of violent crimes against PWDD is difficult to determine. Statistics Canada research on homicides does not provide victim information concerning physical or developmental disabilities (Fedorowycz, 2000). The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) crime analysis report allows the respondent to list any outstanding physical features the victim of a violent crime may have. While, overall, this report is very detailed in its classification of violent crimes, it does not allow for any victim information to be collected regarding mental disorders (Douglas, Burgess, Burgess, & Ressler, 1992). The U.S. National Crime Survey has not provided information on whether the victim has a disability or not (Luckasson, 1992). However, this omission is now being addressed (Petersilia, Foote, & Crowell, 2001).

While crime against PWDD has received increasing awareness, little attention has been given to homicides of PWDD. The Criminal Code of Canada defines homicide as the killing of one person by another, either directly or indirectly, by any means. Homicide is either culpable, such as for murder, manslaughter, or infanticide, or not culpable, such as self-defence (Rodrigues, 1994). The present study focuses on these homicides to provide preliminary data concerning the number of homicides of PWDD, a preliminary perspective on the characteristics of homicide of PWDD, a framework for understanding abuse issues and discriminatory practices against PWDD, and prevention issues concerning these acts.

History has witnessed the homicide of PWDD en mass. The role of German physicians, nurses, and other medical staff in the euthanasia of children and adults with developmental disabilities during the Third Reich has been well-documented (Burleigh, 1994; Gallagher, 1990; Mitscherlich & Mielke, 1962; Proctor, 1988, 1992). State sanctioned acts such as Germany's Aktion T-4 program ultimately resulted in the euthanasia and cremation of tens of thousands of children and adults with developmental disabilities residing in mental institutions and hospitals (Gallagher, 1990). In 1939, prior to Aktion T-4, the German Reich committee made registration of infants with developmental and physical disabilities compulsory for physicians and midwives. Once registered, children were admitted to "clinics" where almost all died from starvation, disease, drug overdose, or gassing (Burleigh, 1994).

Individual cases of homicide of PWDD have been diverse. There are homicides committed by caregivers and service providers, some of which have been rationalized as acts of mercy (Polman, 1995). Other deaths of PWDD involving caregivers appeared to be due to neglect (Christensen, 1997). Some deaths have been attributed to punishment procedures (Buser, 1995). Linda Cornelison, 19, described as having mental retardation and an inability to speak, received 61 aversives from caregivers on the day she died, while attending the Judge Rotenberg Center, formerly known as the Behaviour Research Institute. Aversives consisted of being repeatedly forced to smell ammonia, spanked, pinched, and forced to eat taste aversives such as a vinegar mix, jalapeno peppers, or hot sauce. The aversives were used as a means to influence her behaviour. It was reported that staff mistook Linda's attempt to communicate her pain and discomfort due to gastric bleeding for target behaviours (Lasalandra, 1995a, 1995b).

Similar to caregiver homicide cases, intrafamilial homicides have been justified as mercy. In some of these cases, the parent seemed unwilling to request or receive help with childcare (Bennetto, 2000). Murder-suicides may also appear to be acts of desperation by a parent overwhelmed by his or her childcare responsibilities. However, in these cases, the parent takes his or her own life as well (LaSalle, 1995). Fedorowycz (2000) indicated that in 1999, 8% percent of all homicides in Canada were murder-suicides. In 93% of cases, the accused was male. Almost 90% of murder-suicides were family related.

In some cases of intrafamilial homicide, victims endured chronic abuse, ultimately leading to their death (Kalfrin, 1999). In other cases of chronic abuse of children with developmental disabilities (CWDD), siblings without disabilities received preferential treatment from the parents (Associated Press, 1995). In the case of a mother and her three friends beating her 38-year-old son with developmental disabilities to death, prior to hiding his body in a cave, the intent to do harm was more direct (Stivender, 1999). In a number of cases of intrafamilial homicide, the child's non-biological parent has been implicated. These cases generally involve step, adoptive, and foster parents. They may also involve the boyfriend or girlfriend of the child's parent (Becka, 1999; Horswell, 2000; O'Doherty, 1989).

Roommates have been implicated in the deaths of PWDD. In these cases, the alleged perpetrator is usually another person with developmental disabilities (Bullard, 1995). Some homicides have involved strangers killing PWDD (Sowa, 1998), while others have been perpetrated by acquaintances. In these cases, the perpetrator is known to the victims, but is not considered a roommate, caregiver, or family member. These individuals may be fellow employees, or classmates ("Texas man sentenced to die for torture killing," 1998; "Two men on trial charged with killing a woman they used for target practice," 1998).

Method

Content analysis, "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18), was used to examine media stories about homicides of PWDD. Carney (1972) notes that, "analysis of the content of communications is, traditionally, the domain of classical content analysis" (p.44). Krippendorff (1980) explains that its purpose is to "provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of 'facts,' and a practical guide to action" (p. 21).

Content analysis can employ qualitative methods, quantitative methods, or a combination of the two (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Qualitative content analysis allows more detailed interpretation of specific text passages. Quantitative content analysis provides more objective analysis of specific characteristics of a sample, but lacks the richness of detail available through qualitative analysis. In this study, quantitative content analysis is used as the primary tool for testing hypotheses. This analysis is supplemented by examples from selected articles that illustrate some of the thematic qualities relevant to those hypotheses.

Babbie (1999) comments that the advantages of content analysis over other types of research methods are that it is economical in terms of time and money. A single individual can collect a large amount of research over a short period of time. Content analysis is also unobtrusive and allows one to study a process longitudinally. With stories or accounts already written, subjects would rarely be effected by the analysis of their stories.

Babbie (1999) notes that weaknesses of content analysis stem from its dependence on recorded communication. By analyzing existing records, one is dependent on the accuracy and objectivity of those records. Inaccuracies in reporting cannot be substantiated unless conflicting or updated information is provided. Therefore, an assumption is made that the information communicated is accurate.

The research methods used in this study were similar to those used in Lucardie's (2001) study on news media accounts of intrafamilial homicide of PWDD. Richards (2000) used this method to analyze child homicide and fatal child abuse cases, and to help identify characteristics associated with the victim, perpetrator, and circumstances of the murder. Chermak (1995) utilized a similar method to examine the presentation of crime and victims in print and electronic media.

The terminology used throughout this study focuses on homicides and PWDD. The term homicide is used to indicate the death of an individual resulting from one of the following causes:

- death resulting from the deliberate action of another person who intends to cause death,
- death resulting from the deliberate inaction of another person who intends to cause death,
- death caused by the deliberate action or inaction of another person when death is a foreseeable possible outcome, and
- death caused by a negligent action or inaction of another person where death is a foreseeable possible outcome.

Cases involving the death of a PWDD as a result of homicide that were not included in this study consisted of those which were deemed to result from self-defense or state-sanctioned executions. In self-defense cases, the death of the PWDD resulted from self-defensive actions taken by the individual being attacked or in fear of being attacked. With state sanctioned executions, the death of a PWDD resulted from him or her being executed by the state for crimes committed.

Kiernan and Schalock (1995) define developmental disability as any neurological condition that occurs prior to 18 years of age. The condition affects either mental or physical functioning or both. The condition is also chronic, meaning that the person will likely have this condition for the duration of his or her lifetime. The term developmental disability also emphasizes a person's functional capacity. Impairment or significant functional limitations are identified in three or more areas including self-care, both receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity of independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. Significant functional limitations are defined by the amount of assistance required to perform activities, such as moderate to constant assistance. Disabilities which are included under this definition are mental retardation, autism, Down syndrome and other chromosomal anomalies, hydrocephalus, microcephalus, spina bifida, some metabolic and immune deficiency disorders, fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy. Disabilities that do not fall under this description include those occurring after age 18 such as those resulting from accidents or trauma, substance abuse, aging, or disabilities resulting from mental illness.

Electronic media cases, including newspaper articles, magazine articles, and transcripts of radio and television news reports that had been indexed for electronic retrieval, were utilized to obtain information pertaining to the homicides of PWDD. The mass media has been identified as a primary source of crime and criminal justice information (Graber, 1980). Media accounts were selected because of the ease of access and the information provided by reporters, which may not be easily available through other resources. This method also allows longitudinal examination of homicides of PWDD and is non-intrusive regarding access to information.

While several online services were used, Lexis-Nexis Directory of Online Services was used most extensively. Lexis-Nexis consists of numerous libraries, which consist of files, consisting of documents. The documents are in "full-text" meaning that every word of the original document is included. News Library, which consists of documents from North American and overseas English language newspapers, was predominantly used. The files used were Full-text Group Files, in particular, ALLNWS. Not all newspapers included in ALLNWS were catalogued according to the same time frame. For example, at the time this study was conducted, the *Washington Post* dated back to January, 1977, while the *Boston Herald* only dated back to January, 1994.

Searches on ALLNWS were conducted using key words as search terms. For the purpose of this study, homicide victims were considered to have a developmental disability if any of the following terms were used to describe them: mental retardation, mentally handicapped, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, autistic, developmentally delayed, developmentally disabled, retarded, severely disabled, multiple handicapped, mentally challenged, intellectually disabled, feebleminded, and mongoloid. The term mentally retarded was not used, because it would have been included in the search using the term retarded. The term Down syndrome also included cases that used the term Down's syndrome.

Search terms used to obtain information on homicides included homicide, murder, manslaughter, and killed. The combination of disability and homicide terms were given a parameter of "within 15 words," meaning that the term used to describe the disability must occur within 15 words distance from the term used to describe the homicide. For example, the search "mental retardation w/15 homicide" would provide stories that included the words mental retardation and homicide, within 15 words of each other. Additional parameters were used to further limit searches. The word "and" was used to reduce the number of stories obtained by a search. For instance, the search "retarded w/15 homicide and victim" provides stories, which include the words retarded, homicide, and victim within 15 words of each other. This search excluded stories focusing on a person described as retarded, who killed another person who was not described as being retarded.

Because the search protocols for various electronic data bases differed, the exact search methods were altered to suit each specific database. Each story found by electronic search methods was reviewed to confirm that it described a homicide event involving a victim with a developmental disability. Many stories that were collected in the initial electronic searches were eliminated. Most of those eliminated were rejected for one of the following reasons:

1) The homicide victim did not have a developmental disability (e.g., the victim worked with people with developmental disabilities);
2) The event was not an apparent homicide (e.g., a person with a developmental disability was killed by accident); or
3) The homicide event was fictional (e.g., a novel or movie depicting a murder).

Results

The results from this study found 1128 cases of homicides of PWDD, representing 1967 deaths. Some cases involved multiple deaths. Reporters described PWDD using different descriptors. When cases were categorized according to the most descriptive condition of the victim, the most common condition was mental retardation (818), followed by cerebral palsy (110), Down syndrome (60), autism (43), developmental disability (40), fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal drug syndrome (24), epilepsy (18), spina bifida (9), hydrocephalus (5), and muscular dystrophy (1).

While one case of homicide dated as far back as the early 1764, the majority of cases dated from 1980 to the present. This generally reflected greater access to media information pertaining to homicides of PWDD through electronic means, rather than an increase in incidence of homicide of PWDD. The average year reported was 1990, with a median year of 1992. Information obtained about earlier accounts of homicide resulted from present day coverage of these cases. The majority of homicide cases came from the United States (700/1128). This reflected the greater number of media sources in the database from the United States. It does not suggest that PWDD living in the United States are at greater risk of being killed. China (222), Canada (64), England (24), Japan (13), Germany (10), Yugoslavia (9), Australia (8) and other countries were also represented.

Not all stories used in this study provided full information concerning the circumstances of the homicide or the characteristics of the people involved. Some stories could not be followed up to determine if the individual who was first felt to be responsible for the homicide was later determined to be the actual person involved. In addition, reporters may have mislabeled some implicated individuals regarding their relationship to the person killed. The researcher accepted the label given by reporters as factual and did not attempt to re-label those implicated. If two or more stories conflicted regarding information, the most reliable source was retained. If this was not possible, the case was relabeled "unknown."

Those felt to be responsible in the death of PWDD were categorized according to one of seven groups to allow for easier comparison. The Acquaintance group consisted of those individuals who were known to the person killed, but were not considered family members, caregivers, or roommates. The Caregiver group consisted of those individuals who provided care to PWDD such as paid caregivers (i.e., physicians, nurses, nurses' aides), or other care providers (i.e., group home employees, teachers, and babysitters).

The Family group consisted of parents or parental figures, siblings, and other family members. Parents included biological, step, adoptive, and foster parents. Boyfriends and girlfriends of parents also were included in this group. Siblings consisted of biological, adoptive, and half siblings. Other family included aunts, uncles, grandparents, spouses, in-laws, nieces, and nephews. The researcher did not attempt to re-label those implicated in the death of PWDD regarding their relationship with person killed, or label those implicated based on the amount of time they had known the PWDD.

For example, father's or mother's partner was assumed to be in a parental role within the family.

The Government group included to those PWDD killed by representatives of the government, which included the state, militia or military, and police. Caregivers from orphanages in China were included in this group because China's Ministry of Civil Affairs oversees these institutions, thus reflecting state policy, not the independent acts of individual caregivers.

The Roommate group included those PWDD who were allegedly killed by someone who resided with the PWDD, usually in a group home setting, such as another PWDD. The Stranger group included those individuals who were not known to the PWDD. For the Unknown category, not enough information was available to more precisely determine who killed the PWDD.

Table 1 illustrates the gender division of PWDD who were killed, sorted by implicated group. Caregivers, family members and government representatives were implicated in the greatest number of homicide cases and PWDD killed. PWDD for whom gender information was available, were generally male regardless of who was implicated in their death. But the predominance of male victims was much stronger in some groups than others.

Table 1
Gender of PWDD Sorted by Implicated Groups

Perpetrators	Cases	Male	%	Female	%	Unknown	%	N	%
Acquaintances	93	72	75.79%	22	23.16%	1	1.05%	95	100.00%
Caregivers	212	136	21.28%	65	10.17%	438	68.54%	639	100.00%
Family	308	155	49.36%	148	47.13%	11	3.50%	314	100.00%
Government	268	150	25.51%	119	20.24%	319	54.25%	588	100.00%
Roommate	34	40	50.63%	7	8.86%	32	40.51%	79	100.00%
Strangers	65	46	67.65%	22	32.35%	0	0.00%	68	100.00%
Unknown	148	72	39.13%	67	36.41%	45	24.46%	184	100.00%
Total	1128	671	34.11%	450	22.88%	846	43.01%	1967	100.00%

For the Unknown gender category, the gender of those killed could not be determined based on the available information. Caregivers and Government groups accounted for 62.38% (1227/1967) of PWDD killed. For the majority of these PWDD, not enough information was provided regarding gender. A number of these cases involved multiple deaths. Family members were implicated in the death of an additional 15.96% (314/1967) PWDD. Of these, similar numbers of males and females were identified.

Table 2 illustrates the gender division of those implicated in the death of PWDD sorted by implicated group. The majority of those implicated in the deaths of PWDD could not be identified by gender, from the available information. The majority of those implicated, who could not be identified by gender, were from the Caregiver, Government and Unknown groups. In some cases of homicide, multiple individuals were implicated in the death of PWDD.

Table 2

Known Gender of Individual(s) Implicated Sorted by Implicated Groups

Perpetrators	Male	%	Female	%	N	%
Acquaintances	53	89.83%	6	10.17%	59	100.00%
Caregivers	70	61.40%	44	38.60%	114	100.00%
Family	170	46.45%	196	53.55%	366	100.00%
Government	11	100.00%	0	0.00%	11	100.00%
Roommate	42	75.00%	14	25.00%	56	100.00%
Strangers	20	80.00%	5	20.00%	25	100.00%
Unknown	34	97.14%	1	2.86%	35	100.00%
Total	400	60.06%	266	39.94%	666	100.00%

Of the 666 known individuals thought to be responsible for homicides of PWDD, 60.06% were male, and 39.94% were female. Implicated males dominated all groups with the exception of the Family group. For this group, biological parents, especially biological mothers were most often held responsible for the death of family members with developmental disabilities. This may reflect the primary role mothers continue to play in raising their children. This also has implications for fathers and boyfriends who generally have less responsibility with childcare, but are still largely implicated in the deaths of children, given the amount of time spend caring for them.

Table 3

PWDD's Age Sorted by Implicated Groups

Age	Acquaint.	Caregiver	Family	Govt.	Rm.	Stranger	Unknown	N	%
0-4	3	88	101	160	0	2	9	363	35.11%
5-9	2	10	54	42	2	3	8	121	11.70%
10-14	8	22	32	13	1	4	8	88	8.51%
15-19	19	18	28	4	1	7	9	86	8.32%
20-24	15	14	17	3	2	9	17	77	7.45%
25-29	9	14	13	3	1	6	14	60	5.80%
30-34	12	11	7	4	5	5	12	56	5.42%
35-39	3	16	9	2	3	8	14	55	5.32%
40-44	7	9	5	2	4	3	5	35	3.38%
45-49	1	10	13	0	2	3	6	35	3.38%
50-54	1	7	4	1	1	4	2	20	1.93%
55-59	2	4	1	0	1	1	4	13	1.26%
60-64+	3	8	6	0	1	2	5	25	2.42%
Total	85	231	290	234	24	57	113	1034	100.00%

Table 3 illustrates the age ranges of PWDD who were killed, sorted by implicated groups. Age information was available for only 1034 PWDD killed. The majority of homicides concerned the very young, with 35.11% (363/1034) PWDD being four years of age or younger. The next largest group was between the ages of 5 and 9, with 55.32% (572/1034) of PWDD killed being 14 years of age or younger. The number of reported PWDD killed declined as their ages increased. Of the 933 PWDD who were killed, but for whom no specific age information was available, 54 were described by the media as children and 112 were described as adults. Of the 767 PWDD for whom no age information was available, 345 were from the Caregiver group and 320 were from the Government group and pertained to media cases documenting mass homicides of PWDD. One case involved the deaths of 200 institutionalized PWDD who died as a result of starvation in Sweden in 1941. Another case involved the deaths of 300 PWDD killed by Hutu militia in Rwanda in 1994.

Further examination of Table 3 indicates that caregivers, family members, and government representatives were primarily implicated in the deaths of very young children. Family members were implicated in 34.83% (101/290) of deaths of children under four years of age, with 64.48% (187/290) children being 14 years of age or younger. Government representatives were implicated in the deaths of 91.88% (215/234) children 14 years of age or younger. A similar number of male and female deaths of children in this age group were observed. PWDD killed by acquaintances were generally between the ages of 15 to 34 years, with the majority being male. Those killed by strangers were generally between the ages of 15 to 39 years. The majority of PWDD killed by roommates were adults. For the Unknown group, the greatest number of PWDD killed was between the ages of 20 to 39 years.

Table 4

Primary Act Causing Death Sorted by Implicated Group

Act	Acquaint.	Caregiver	Family	Govt.	Rm.	Stranger	Unknown	N	%
Asphyxia	17	28	35	3	8	2	18	111	5.64%
Beaten	34	21	62	11	9	11	36	184	9.35%
Burned	2	139	25	2	55	6	10	239	12.15%
Restraint	0	30	1	3	0	0	0	34	1.73%
Drowned	3	17	16	0	1	5	0	42	2.14%
Envir.	0	9	5	0	1	0	1	16	0.81%
Neglect	0	325	41	212	0	0	3	581	29.54%
Poisoned	1	20	24	1	0	0	0	46	2.34%
Shot	13	2	50	23	2	14	9	113	5.74%
Stabbed	11	3	16	1	2	5	16	54	2.75%
Vehicular	0	10	2	0	1	20	3	36	1.83%
Unknown	5	24	27	327	0	4	56	443	22.52%
Others	9	11	10	5	0	1	32	68	3.46%
Total	95	639	314	588	79	68	184	1967	100.00%

Table 4 illustrates the primary act causing death, sorted by implicated group. While news information clearly reported that a PWDD had been killed, at times it was difficult to discern the primary act causing death if multiple means were used. In such cases, what appeared to be the singular primary act resulting in death was categorized.

The majority of PWDD died as a result of neglect. This category included death by medical neglect and starvation. Medical neglect consisted, in part, of denial of medical treatment and neglect of patients' needs, such as ensuring that their breathing tube was clear. Caregivers and the government representatives were primarily implicated in these acts with most PWDD dying as a result of starvation or denial of medical treatment. For the Caregiver group, neglect resulted in the deaths of 325 PWDD, or 50.86% of all deaths within this group. The majority of individuals killed in the Caregiver group who died as a result of neglect, could not be identified according to age. However, 71 were identified as being four years old or younger.

For the Government group, 212 PWDD died as a result of neglect, contributing to 36.05% of all deaths within the group. State orphanages in Shanghai, China accounted for 215 infant and children's deaths between 1989 to 1992, termed "summary resolutions." Of these, 210 deaths generally resulted from complications due, in part, to starvation and denial of medical treatment. For this study, these homicides were not considered culpable, because they reflected government policy.

Neglect was the third most common cause of death of PWDD in the Family group, accounting for 41 deaths. Twenty-five victims were nine years of age or younger, 13 were four years of age or younger. Starvation contributed to the deaths of 33 PWDD.

Being burned was the second most common known cause of death of PWDD, accounting for 239 deaths. While the majority of PWDD died by fire, this category also included chemical burns and scalding. Death by burns was the primary cause of death of PWDD in the Roommate group and the second most common cause of death of PWDD in the Caregiver group. For the Caregiver group, death by fire generally resulted from negligent homicide, defined as the killing of another through negligence. The majority of these cases were incidents of group homes or institutions burned down in Argentina, Chile, and the United States. Approximately 90% of PWDD in the Caregiver group who died as a result of burns could not be identified according to age.

Beating was the third most common known cause of death of PWDD, and was the primary cause of death in the Acquaintance, Family, and Unknown groups. Beating was defined by punching, kicking, or hitting someone using an object. In the Acquaintance and Unknown groups, death by beating was twice as common a cause of death than any other act. The majority of PWDD in the Acquaintance group who were beaten to death were between the ages of 15 to 44 years of age. In the Family group, 54.84% of PWDD (34/62) who were beaten to death were four years of age or younger.

Death by shooting, defined by the lethal use of a firearm or crossbow, was the fourth most common known cause of death of PWDD and was the second most common act causing death for the Family, Government, and Stranger groups. Death by asphyxia was the fifth most common, and included death by suffocation, strangulation, smothering, and hanging. Death by asphyxia was the second most common cause of death for the Acquaintance and Unknown groups.

Additional acts causing deaths that were categorized included death by "restraint," which referred to those PWDD who died as a result of being forcefully restrained by others. These acts were most frequently reported in hospital or institutional settings. A common scenario would involve the victim being pinned on the floor by hospital aides, unable to breathe. In other scenarios, victims would be tied up in leather wrist and ankle cuffs or vests and left unattended for periods of time. Death by restraint would generally result from asphyxia or cardiac arrest.

The drowned category predominantly involved caregivers and family members. In the Caregiver group, many of the victims drowned in the bathtub after being left unattended by their caregivers. These cases were generally considered negligent homicides, defined as the killing of another through negligence. In the Family group, while some cases involved children left unattended in the bathtub, others involved children who were purposefully drowned.

The environment category included deaths of PWDD resulting from exposure to the elements. Many cases involved victims who died as a result of hyperthermia after being left unattended by their caregivers or family in a vehicle on a hot day. These cases were most frequently labeled negligent homicides.

The poisoned category included those PWDD who died as a result of gassing or the over-administration of medication. Death by carbon monoxide was most frequently observed for the Family group. In all of these cases, the PWDD was killed by one of his or her parents. The child was usually left in the car, in an enclosed space, with the car running. For the Caregiver group, many of the PWDD died as a result of a drug overdose or lethal injection.

Death by stabbing included those cases where the PWDD's body was penetrated by an object such as a knife, sharp stick, or sword, resulting in death.

The vehicular category included those PWDD who died as a result of being struck by a vehicle or those who died during a motor vehicle accident. For the Caregiver group, the individual implicated in the homicide was usually under the influence of alcohol or drugs while operating a motor vehicle. The resulting vehicle accident, through collision or driving into a body of water, caused the death of passengers with developmental disabilities. For the Stranger group, the driver was usually not under the influence of substances. The majority of cases in this category were considered negligent homicides. Many involved multiple victims who were travelling by van or bus.

The Unknown category consisted of cases where the exact cause of death was undetermined. Provided information indicated that the PWDD had a developmental disability and that the death was considered a crime. For example, one case involved the discovery of a skeleton of a PWDD found within the wall of a building, entombed in concrete. This category also included over 300 PWDD who were killed by militia or military perpetrators. Many of these deaths resulted from mass homicides in Rwanda and Bosnia.

The Others category consisted of those acts causing death that did not fall under any of the previous categories. These include, in part, euthanasia, death by shaking, death by falling from a height, and electrocution.

Discussion

This study indicates that more homicide stories were written about the killing of males than females with developmental disabilities. Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk's (1998) study on media coverage of homicides supports this finding and reports that significantly more males in the general population were victims of homicide. In addition, a greater majority of developmental disabilities are seen among males. Therefore, while more news stories pertained to PWDD who are male, they may be generally more frequent victims of homicide.

In this study, homicide stories most often implicated caregivers, government representatives, and family members in the deaths of PWDD. While caregivers and government representatives have not frequently been the focus of homicide media research, Pritchard and Hughes (1997) found that intrafamilial homicides such as infanticides received the greatest amount of news coverage, suggesting similarities with results from this present study. This finding was not supported by Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk's (1998) media research, which found that homicides implicating strangers and acquaintances received more news coverage than victims killed by family. Findings of PWDD were similar to Statistics Canada research on homicide, which found that male perpetrators accounting for 90% of all homicides in 1999 (Fedorowycz, 2000).

Statistics Canada research on homicides indicates that between 1989 and 1998, 36.1% of homicides, on average, were committed by family members, 49.0% of victims were killed by acquaintances, and 14.9% were killed by strangers and unknowns combined (Fedorowycz, 2000). By comparison, results from the present study indicate that 15.96% (314/1967) of homicides of PWDD implicated family members, 8.85% (174/1967) implicated acquaintances and roommates combined, and 12.81% (252/1967) implicated strangers and unknowns combined. Acquaintances and roommates, and strangers and unknowns were combined to allow for comparison with Canadian statistics. Statistics Canada findings did not focus specifically on caregivers or government representatives. If these two groups are removed from the database of homicides of PWDD, then family members were implicated in 42.43% (314/740) of homicides, acquaintances and roommates combined were implicated in 23.51% (174/740) of homicides, and strangers and unknowns combined implicated in 34.05% (252/740) of homicides of PWDD. While direct comparison is not possible, these findings suggest that family members and strangers may be implicated in a greater proportion of homicides of PWDD than people without developmental disabilities.

In this study, many PWDD were killed in hospitals and institutions by caregivers or government representatives. For PWDD living in institutions, their physical and social isolation may be among the many contributing factors to being victimized or discriminated against. If society is unaware of abuses or discriminatory practices occurring in group homes or institutions, then individuals responsible for these acts retain a degree of anonymity. Zimbardo (1970) suggested that an individual is more likely to behave aggressively if conditions allow for his or her anonymity to be safeguarded. Inhibition is reduced in part from the deflection of personal responsibility and lack of scrutiny. Zimbardo's research also demonstrated that assigned roles and situational forces could significantly contribute to aggressive behaviour (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). For caregivers, the responsibility to control and manage residents may result in behavioral interventions that are abusive and potentially fatal. In particular, the physical use of restraints to control or punish inappropriate behaviour has resulted in the deaths of residents (Weiss, 1998).

Homicides of PWDD by caregivers, family members, or government representatives frequently stemmed from neglect. A *summary resolution* policy of fatal neglect, defined by starvation and denial of medical treatment in China's state orphanages, contributed to the deaths of the majority of abandoned infants and children with developmental disabilities in the Government group (Human Rights Watch, 1996a; 1996b). In the media, the focus on such terms as *summary resolution*, *euthanasia* and *mercy killing* may imply that death is an appropriate alternative to life with a disability. Using the term *mercy killing* instead of *murder* may provide the reader with a different perspective concerning the relationship between PWDD and those providing for their care. While both terms may imply intent, one suggests that the intent is merciful while the other implies that it is not.

If society considers it acceptable to kill people with developmental disabilities because of their disability, then disability provides justification for killing someone. Whitmer (1997) explained that acts of violence are mediated by "the cultural context of expectations and acceptability or tolerance for the expression of violent behaviour" (p. 56). Freud (1961) distinguished between legitimate violence, which is viewed as acceptable through its validation by law or social acceptance, versus illegitimate violence which is not socially acceptable and hence a threat to society. The shift from legitimacy to illegitimacy may be based on people's perception of the circumstances surrounding the act of violence. If the deaths of PWDD can be justified in terms of *summary resolution*, *euthanasia*, or *mercy killing*, and are viewed by society as socially acceptable, then responsibility for the action or inaction resulting in death of PWDD can be attributed to the victim.

The shift of responsibility to PWDD for their death has historical roots. Douglas (1995) observed that the use of scapegoats was a universal phenomenon, traditionally used as a means of atonement for sins and evolving as a means to avoid blame and victimise innocent individuals. The mass exterminations of PWDD in Nazi Germany during the Second World War were in part justified because PWDD were portrayed as "useless eaters," who did not contribute to society because of their disability (Wolfensberger, 1981).

Societal validation of discrimination against PWDD is seen through such public mediums as film, television, newspapers, magazines, comic books, and computer games. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli's (1994) cultivation theory in part explains how one's perception can change over time depending on the amount and kind of media products one watches. Watching violent films increases our tolerance of violent behaviour in others and reduces our feelings of empathy for the victim (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988). This becomes a concern when disability in television and film is frequently equated with criminality, evil embodiment, or punishment for evil. The person with a disability is often portrayed as impulsive, violent, sexually deviant, maladjusted, and less than human (Longmore, 1987). The death of these characters is often portrayed as the only humane and logical solution.

Bandura (1977) argued that aggressive behaviour is more likely to be modeled by others if the person behaving aggressively is rewarded for doing so. By negatively stereotyping PWDD, and by modeling violence against them through public mediums, society may be placing PWDD at greater risk for abuse by communicating that abuse of PWDD is appropriate. For example, if a parent kills his or her child with developmental disabilities (CWDD) and receives public support and a more lenient sentence by the courts, as compared to the minimum punishment for murder, as seen with Robert Latimer's killing of his daughter Tracy (Woodward, 1998), then this may place other CWDD at risk for intrafamilial homicide. Lucardie and Sobsey (2001) documented the Canadian media's negative portrayal of people with cerebral palsy, through the use of stigmatizing language, particularly when they were victims of homicide. The possible implications of this media coverage for the public was also explored.

In this study, a significant number of homicide stories pertained to infants and children with developmental disabilities. These findings were similar to Pritchard and Hughes (1997), who found that the homicide of children accounted for the majority of news coverage. The authors concluded that the newsworthiness of homicides was increased when victims were Caucasian, female, children, or senior citizens. Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk (1998) agreed that these victim groups received more news coverage than would be expected based on incidence of these types of homicides. However, their study also showed that victims over the age of 15 accounted for greater news coverage than victims who were younger, in part, contradicting the findings our study. Results from Statistics Canada's research on children and youths as victims of violent crimes support the results of the present study, reporting a significantly higher number of homicides of infants and new-borns compared to any other age group (Johnson, 1995).

Reporters appear to find some acts causing death more newsworthy than others. Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk (1998) found that homicides involving guns were more newsworthy than homicides involving weapons other than guns. Statistics Canada reported similar findings when examining methods of committing homicide, where they found that the majority of deaths resulted from shooting (30.2%), followed by stabbing (26.5%), beating (22.6%), and strangulation (10.1%) (Fedorowycz, 2000). The results from the present study found that the majority of PWDD died as a result of neglect, followed by being burned, beaten, shot, and asphyxiated. When weapons were used, guns were most frequently represented. However, death by beating, which included those PWDD who died as a result of being beaten with an object, was the third most common act causing death.

With many PWDD in this study dying as a result of being beaten, factors which would generally inhibit a person from killing another appear less inhibiting when the victim is disabled. With distance theory, Grossman (1995) explained that our resistance to killing others increased as our physical distance from them decreased. Being at knife range, or hand to hand combat range would foster greater resistance towards killing another versus handgun or rifle range.

Grossman (1995) also argues that resistance towards killing is related to our emotional distance from the victim, as defined in part, by cultural, moral, and social means. Cultural distance focuses on the perception that others are different from us, based on such attributes as ethnicity, gender, religion, or ability. Moral distance refers to the perception that one's actions or cause can be justified or legitimized, as seen in cases of mercy killings. Social distance, as fostered by a caste system or social ranking, focuses on those differences between individuals, as defined in part, by society. Like cultural distance, social distance is seen with hate crimes against identifiable minorities within society, such as PWDD. With the majority of PWDD dying as a result of neglect, resistance to their deaths may have been reduced for those responsible, by allowing them to be further removed emotionally from the victim. Many of those implicated in the deaths of PWDD, such as acquaintances, caregivers, family members, and roommates, knew the victim, and many provided care for them. While social distance suggests that resistance to killing someone whom one knows is high, that these PWDD were killed nonetheless suggests that additional factors associated in part with the victim, accused, or environment, may be placing PWDD at risk for homicide. One such factor may be the relationship bond between those responsible for the homicide of PWDD and the victim. Sobsey (1994) reported that disruption in attachment, caregiver attributes, substance use, history of violence, and perceived stress, were some caregiver factors identified as placing PWDD at risk for abuse.

The presentation of crime stories in newspapers has received recent coverage by researchers (Chermak, 1995; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990; Sorenson, Peterson Manz, & Berk, 1998; Richards, 2000). In a comparison study of newspaper stories about homicides and the epidemiology of homicide, Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk's (1998) found that the *Los Angeles Times* covered only 13.10 percent of all 9,442 homicide cases that occurred in Los Angeles County from 1990 to 1994. This suggests that those PWDD who have been identified as homicide victims may only represent a small number of overall homicides of PWDD. However, it is likely that newspapers in smaller population centres report a higher percentage.

Sobsey (1994) stated that prevention of abuse and discrimination of PWDD needs to focus on empowering individuals to resist abuse, providing appropriate supports to and careful selection of caregivers and families, building safer environments, education and training, law and law enforcement, and changing attitudes. Deinstitutionalisation, normalisation, integration, and inclusion are positive steps towards normalising the environment of PWDD. With greater awareness of the risks for abuse and discrimination, more can be done to prevent PWDD from being victimised.

Conclusion

While crimes against PWDD have received increased interest in the last decade, homicide of PWDD has not been given much attention. This paper provides a preliminary description of homicides of PWDD. The vulnerability of PWDD from abuse and discrimination resulting in their homicide through the action or inaction of others has been demonstrated by findings from this study. Acquaintances, caregivers, family members, government representatives, roommates, and strangers have all been implicated in these homicides. The very young appeared particularly at risk. Distance theory, in part, explains the methods used to commit homicide of PWDD. Disruptions in attachment between those implicated and their victims appear to play a significant role in the vulnerability of PWDD to abuse and discrimination.

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Chapter III

Intrafamilial Homicide of People with Developmental Disabilities

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The research described in this study was conducted with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [Award no. 752-98-1229]. The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities provided additional support for this project through a sub-grant from Temple University's Institute on Disability. The opinions expressed in this study represent only those of the author and not necessarily those of the funding agencies.

Abstract

An increase in interest in crimes against people with developmental disabilities (PWDD) has been observed in the past decade. However, little attention has been given to intrafamilial homicides of PWDD. This paper provides a preliminary description of these types of homicides as they affect PWDD. Content analysis of media accounts of intrafamilial homicides of PWDD describes the characteristics of those involved and the circumstances of the homicides. This study examined a subset of data of 1967 homicides of PWDD and found 308 cases of intrafamilial homicide representing the deaths of 314 PWDD. These homicides represented 15.96% of overall homicides of PWDD obtained in the original study. A similar number of homicides of male and female victims were reported. Compared to other family members, biological parents were most frequently implicated in the deaths of PWDD with biological mothers, acting alone, implicated most often. Biological mothers were most frequently implicated in the deaths of daughters, while biological fathers were most frequently implicated in the deaths of sons. The majority of PWDD who were killed were four years of age or younger. Beating, shooting, neglect, asphyxia, burns, and poisoning were the most common causes of death. Discussion focuses on media representation of homicides, intrafamilial homicide, and prevention.

Intrafamilial Homicide of People with Developmental Disabilities

While the presentation of crime stories in newspapers concerning the general public has received recent attention from researchers (Chermak, 1995; Richards, 2000; Sorenson, Peterson Manz, & Berk, 1998), accounts of intrafamilial homicides of people with developmental disabilities (PWDD) have not been researched. Neither Statistics Canada (Fedorowycz, 2000) nor the U.S. National Crime Survey (Luckasson, 1992) provide homicide victim information concerning physical or developmental disabilities. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) crime analysis report does allow the respondent to list any outstanding physical features the victim of a violent crime may have. While, overall, this report is very detailed in its classification of violent crimes, it does not allow for any victim information to be collected regarding mental disorders (Douglas, Burgess, Burgess, & Ressler, 1992).

This study examined media accounts of intrafamilial homicides of PWDD to provide a preliminary description of these acts and how they affect PWDD. It was part of a larger study that focused on news stories featuring PWDD as victims of homicide. Characteristics associated with PWDD who are killed, family members implicated in their homicides, and the circumstances of the homicides will be examined. The results from this study hopefully will foster a number of hypotheses concerning the homicide and victimization of PWDD and factors that place them at risk from family members. It is hoped that greater awareness and understanding of these types of homicides may also lead to their prevention and may bring about change in the way society perceives and treats PWDD and those who kill them.

Homicide is defined as the killing of one person by another. The term *homicide* differs from *murder* which implies the unlawful killing of one person by another (Houghton Millin Company, 2000). While no formal studies have yet been completed about the homicide of PWDD, it has been well documented that PWDD have been victims of physical and sexual abuse, assault, and homicide (Sobsey, Wells, Lucardie, & Mansell, 1995; Williams, 1995). History has also witnessed the homicide of PWDD, individually and en mass (Burleigh, 1994; Gallagher, 1990; Mitscherlich & Mielke, 1962; Proctor, 1988, 1992).

Research has shown that people with disabilities are at greater risk for sexual and physical abuse (Sobsey & Varnhagen, 1988), and three times more at risk for assault at home (Galey & Pugh, 1995) upon comparison to people without disabilities. Sobsey, Randall, and Parrila (1997) found that boys with disabilities were more frequently physically abused or neglected, than girls with or without disabilities, and boys without disabilities. In a report on the maltreatment of children with disabilities, Crosse, Kaye, and Ratnofsky (1993) found that children with a variety of disabilities were at a risk 1.8 times higher for physical abuse, and 1.6 higher for sexual abuse than children without disabilities. Sullivan and Knutson (1997) reported that children with mental disabilities were 3.3 times more at risk for experiencing maltreatment compared to nondisabled peers. Given these findings, the conclusion can be drawn that children with developmental disabilities (CWDD) may also be more at risk for the most severe form of physical abuse, homicide.

Intrafamilial homicide research from Statistics Canada found that 35% (143) of Canadian victims killed in 1999 were killed by family members. Nine in ten murder-suicides were family related, and a parent perpetrated four in five child homicides (Fedorowycz, 2000). Ewing (1997) reported that domestic violence, overwhelming social stress, mental illness, substance abuse, and the availability of firearms were some causal factors in family violence. Sobsey (1994) noted that factors associated with intrafamilial violence concerning PWDD directly related to the degree of social isolation of the family, disruptions in attachment between parents and their children, family history of violence, and the perceived stress of the caregivers.

Method

Content analysis was used to identify individual cases and information pertaining to these homicides. Content analysis is a research technique that has traditionally been used to analyze the content of communications (Carney, 1972), and can employ both qualitative and quantitative methods (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Qualitative content analysis allows more detailed interpretation of specific text passages. Quantitative content analysis provides more objective analysis of specific characteristics of a sample, but lacks the richness of detail available through qualitative analysis. In this study, quantitative content analysis is used as the primary tool for testing hypotheses. This analysis is supplemented by examples from selected articles that illustrate some of the thematic qualities relevant to those hypotheses.

The advantages of content analysis over other types of research methods are that it is economical, regarding time and money (Babbie, 1999). A single individual can collect a large amount of research over a short period of time. This method is also unobtrusive and allows one to study a process longitudinally. Carney (1972) states that "content analysis is a technique designed for processing abundant data" (p. 193), requiring a specific minimum amount of samples, rich in detail. As Berger (1998) notes, studying a sizable amount of content is one means to address potential difficulties with representative sampling. Babbie notes that weaknesses of content analysis stem from its dependence on the accuracy and objectivity of recorded communication. Inaccuracies in reporting cannot be substantiated unless conflicting or updated information is provided. Therefore, an assumption is made that the information communicated is accurate.

This study focused on homicides rather than other types of crimes against PWDD because of the frequency with which this type of crime is reported in print and electronic media (Chermak, 1995). Electronic media cases, including newspaper articles, magazine articles, and transcripts of radio and television news reports that had been indexed for electronic retrieval were utilized to obtain information pertaining to intrafamilial homicides of PWDD. Graber (1980) identified the mass media as a primary source of crime and criminal justice information. Media accounts were selected because of the ease of access and the information provided by reporters, which may not be easily available through other resources. This method also allows longitudinal study of the topic and is non-intrusive regarding access to information.

The terminology used throughout this study focuses on homicides of PWDD. Homicide is used to indicate the death of an individual resulting from one of the following causes:

- death resulting from the deliberate action of another person who intends to cause death;
- death resulting from the deliberate inaction of another person who intends to cause death;

- death caused by the deliberate action or inaction of another person when death is a foreseeable outcome;
- death caused by a negligent action or inaction of another person where death is a foreseeable outcome.

Homicide cases not included in this study consisted of those PWDD who were killed by someone other than family and those cases in which the homicides were deemed to result from self-defense. In self-defense cases, the death of the PWDD resulted from self-defensive actions taken by the individual being attacked or in fear of being attacked.

Kiernan and Schalock (1995) defined developmental disabilities as any chronic neurological condition that occurs prior to 18 years of age, affecting either mental or physical functioning or both. Impairment or significant functional limitations are identified in three or more areas: self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity of independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. Mental retardation, autism, Down syndrome and other chromosomal anomalies, hydrocephalus, microcephalus, spina bifida, some metabolic and immune deficiency disorders, fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy are included under this definition.

Lexis-Nexis Directory of Online Services was one of several electronic retrieval sources used to obtain media cases about homicides of PWDD. Lexis-Nexis consists of numerous libraries, which consist of files, consisting of documents. The documents are in "full-text," meaning that every word of the original document is included. News Library, which consists of documents from North American and overseas English language newspapers, was predominantly used. Not all newspapers included in ALLNWS were catalogued according to the same time frame, while the *Washington Post* dated back to January 1977, the *Boston Herald* only dated back to January 1994.

Searches on ALLNWS used key words as search terms. For the purpose of this study, homicide victims were considered to have a developmental disability if any of the following terms were used to describe them: mental retardation, mentally handicapped, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, autistic, developmentally delayed, developmentally disabled, retarded, severely disabled, multiple handicapped, mentally challenged, intellectually disabled, feebleminded, and mongoloid. The term mentally retarded was not used because it was included in the search using the term retarded. The term Down's syndrome also included cases that used the term Down syndrome.

Search terms used to obtain information on homicides included homicide, murder, manslaughter, and killed. The combination of disability and homicide terms were given a parameter of within 15 words, meaning that the term used to describe the disability must occur within 15 words distance from the term used to describe the homicide. For example, the search "mental retardation w/15 homicide," would provide stories which included the words mental retardation and homicide within 15 words of each other. The word 'and' was used to reduce the number of stories obtained by a search. For instance, the search "retarded w/15 homicide and victim," provides stories that include the words retarded, homicide, and victim within 15 words of each other. This search excluded stories focusing on a person described as retarded who killed another person who was not described as being retarded.

Additional online services were also used in this study. Because the search protocols for various electronic data bases differed, the exact search methods were altered to suit each specific database. Each story found by electronic search methods was reviewed to confirm that it described a homicide event resulting in the death of a PWDD. Many stories that were collected in the initial electronic searches were eliminated. Most of those eliminated were rejected for one of the following reasons:

1) The homicide victim did not have a developmental disability (e.g., the victim worked with people with developmental disabilities);
2) The event was not an apparent homicide (e.g., a person with a developmental disability was killed by accident); or
3) The homicide event was fictional (e.g., a novel or movie depicting a murder).

Results

This study examined a subset of data of 1967 (1128 media cases) homicides of people with developmental disabilities (PWDD). The results from this present study found 314 (308 media cases) intrafamilial homicides of PWDD, representing 15.96% (314/1967) of overall homicides of PWDD obtained by the original study. Some cases involved multiple deaths. By comparison, Statistics Canada reported that in 1999, family members committed 35% of all solved homicides (Fedorowycz, 2000). However, Canadian figures included only solved homicides involving family members, acquaintances, and strangers. If results from this present study were adjusted to reflect only these three groups, thus excluding caregivers (639/1967), government representatives (588/1967), and unknowns (184/1967) from the original database, then intrafamilial homicides of PWDD represents 56.47% (314/556) of overall homicides of PWDD. While direct comparison is not possible, these findings suggest that PWDD may be at greater risk for intrafamilial homicide than people without developmental disabilities.

When cases were categorized according to the most descriptive condition of the PWDD, the most common condition was mental retardation (151), followed by cerebral palsy (58), Down syndrome (39), developmental disability (21), autism (18), fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal drug syndrome (13), epilepsy (5), spina bifida (2), and hydrocephalus (1). Some cases of homicide dated as far back as the early 1900's; however, the majority of cases dated from 1980 to the present, with a mean of 1991 and a median of 1994. Information obtained about earlier accounts of homicide resulted from present-day coverage of these cases. The greater number of newspaper stories concerning homicides in the last 20 years generally reflected greater access to electronic information pertaining to homicides of PWDD rather than an increase in incidence of homicide of PWDD.

The majority of homicide cases came from the United States (245). This disproportionate number of American homicides reflected the greater number of newspapers in the database from the United States. It does not suggest that PWDD living in the United States are at greater risk of being killed. The fewer number of stories about homicides of PWDD reported in other countries may also reflect the types of stories receiving coverage. English language newspapers from countries where English is a second language, may have focused more on stories with greater national or international versus local appeal. Canada (17), England (10), Israel (6), Japan (6), China (4), New Zealand (4), Australia (2), France (2), and other countries were also represented in this study. For three cases, no country of origin could be determined.

Not all homicide stories used in this study provided full information concerning the circumstances of the homicide or the characteristics of the people involved. Some stories could not be followed up to determine if the individual who was first felt to be responsible for the homicide was later determined to be the actual person involved. In addition, reporters may have mislabeled some implicated individuals regarding their relationship to the person killed. For example, an individual labeled mother may have actually been the stepmother, foster mother, or adoptive mother. The researcher accepted the label given by reporters as factual and did not attempt to re-label suspects unless two stories about the same event reported conflicting information. In these cases, an attempt to identify the most reliable information was made. If conflicts could not be resolved, the case was reclassified as unknown.

The Family group consisted of parents or parental figures (266 cases/272 victims) such as mother's boyfriend/partner or father's girlfriend/partner, siblings (28 cases and victims), and extended family members (14 cases and victims). Parents included biological, step, adoptive, and foster parents. As well, boyfriends and girlfriends of parents were included in this group. Siblings consisted of biological, adoptive, and half siblings. Extended family included aunts, uncles, grandparents, spouses, in-laws, nieces, and nephews. The researcher did not attempt to re-label suspects regarding their relationship with the victim, or label suspects based on the amount of time they had known the victim. For example, father's girlfriend or mother's boyfriend was assumed to be in a parental role within the family.

As seen in Table 1, males represented 49.36% (155/314) of PWDD and females represented 47.13% (148/314). The gender of 11 PWDD could not be ascertained from the information gathered. The average age of individuals killed, for whom this data was available, was 14.40 years. The median age was 8.00 years.

Table 1

Gender of PWDD Sorted by Implicated Group

	Parents	Siblings	Extended Family		
Gender	n	n	n	N	%
Male	136	13	6	155	49.36
Female	125	15	8	148	47.13
Unknown	11	0	0	11	03.50
Total	272	28	14	314	100.00

As seen in Table 2, 345 individuals felt to be responsible for the homicide of PWDD were identified. Approximately 52 percent were (180/345) female and 47.54% (164/345) were male. There was insufficient information to determine the gender of one individual. All together, 303 parents were implicated in the deaths of family members, representing 266 cases. In 228 cases, individual parents acted alone. In 38 cases, parents acted with another person, usually the other parent.

Table 2

Gender of Individuals Implicated Sorted by Implicated Group

	Parents	Siblings	Extended Family		
Gender	n	n	n	N	%
Male	134	20	10	164	47.54
Female	169	8	3	180	52.17
Unknown	0	0	1	1	00.29
Total	303	28	14	345	100.00

Parents were implicated in 86.62% (272/314) family homicides, of which 36.40% (99/272) were CWDD four years of age or younger. In 55.15% (150/272) of these deaths, children were nine years or younger. Biological parents were implicated in 68.47% (215/314) of familial homicides (see Table 3). Biological mothers acting alone were implicated in 38.21% (120/314) of deaths. They were implicated twice as often in the deaths of children four years of age or younger than biological fathers, and were predominately implicated in the deaths of their daughters. Biological mothers were also implicated in a greater number of deaths of children in the five- to 24-year-old categories than biological fathers. Biological fathers acting alone were implicated in 21.34% (67/314) of deaths and were predominately implicated in the deaths of their sons. Biological parents acting together were implicated in an additional 8.92% (28/314) of deaths of family members.

Table 3

Relationship of Implicated Individual to PWDD

	Male	%	Female	%	Unknown	%	Total	%
Parents								
Biological Mother	50	41.67%	63	52.50%	7	5.83%	120	100.00%
Biological Father	42	62.69%	25	37.31%	0	0.00%	67	100.00%
Biological Parents	12	42.86%	12	42.86%	4	14.29%	28	100.00%
Step Mother	0	0.00%	1	100.00%	0	0.00%	1	100.00%
Step Father	5	62.50%	3	37.50%	0	0.00%	8	100.00%
Adoptive Mother	4	66.67%	2	33.33%	0	0.00%	6	100.00%
Adoptive Father	2	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	100.00%
Adoptive Parents	1	33.33%	2	66.67%	0	0.00%	3	100.00%
Foster Mother	6	60.00%	4	40.00%	0	0.00%	10	100.00%
Foster Father	2	33.33%	4	66.67%	0	0.00%	6	100.00%
Foster Parents	2	40.00%	3	60.00%	0	0.00%	5	100.00%
Mother's Boyfriend	10	62.50%	6	37.50%	0	0.00%	16	100.00%
Siblings	13	46.43%	15	53.57%	0	0.00%	28	100.00%
Extended Family	6	42.86%	8	57.14%	0	0.00%	14	100.00%
Total	155	49.36%	148	47.13%	11	3.50%	314	100.00%

Step-parents, adoptive parents, and foster parents were also implicated in the death of their children, with mothers implicated more frequently than fathers, except in the step-parent category. Step-parents were thought to be responsible for 2.87% (9/314) of homicides, while adoptive parents were implicated in 3.50% (11/314). Foster parents were implicated in 6.69% (21/314) of homicides.

Mothers' boyfriends were implicated in 5.10% (16/314) of familial homicides. Fifteen of those killed were under 18 years of age, 10 of whom were 4 years of age or younger. The average age of those killed was 5.97 years with a median of 3.25 years. Ten PWDD were male and nine PWDD died as a result of being beaten.

Siblings were implicated in 8.92% (28/314) of familial homicides, with biological siblings held responsible for the majority of those. Specifically, biological brothers were implicated in 18 homicides, while biological sisters were thought to be responsible for 8 homicides. Biological siblings were implicated in an equal number of male and female homicides. Two cases of family members being killed involved an adoptive brother, and half brother. Extended family members were implicated in an additional 14 homicides. No cases were found implicating step-parents acting together or fathers' girlfriends.

While the newspaper articles used were clear on the fact that the PWDD were killed, sometimes it was difficult to discern what act resulted in death. For instance, if a PWDD was tortured for an extensive period of time, the act causing death may have come from the blow to the head, dehydration, or internal bleeding. In such cases, what appeared to be the singular primary act resulting in death was categorized.

Table 4 lists the most common acts causing the death of a family member with developmental disabilities. For the "Child" and "Adult" categories, the exact age of the PWDD killed, could not be determined. For the "Unknown" category, the only information available indicated that a family member had killed a PWDD.

Table 4

Category of Homicide by Age

Age	Beaten	Shot	Neglect	Asphyxia	Burns	Poison	Other	Total
0-4	34	8	13	10	6	5	25	101
5-9	14	1	12	6	3	2	16	54
10-14	4	3	7	6	4	2	6	32
15-19	2	5	3	2	5	5	6	28
20-24	3	5	2	0	2	1	4	17
25-29	0	5	0	1	2	2	3	13
30-34	0	3	1	1	0	2	0	7
35-39	2	3	1	0	1	1	1	9
40-44	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	5
45-49	1	7	0	1	1	1	2	13
50 +	1	3	1	1	0	2	3	11
Child	1	0	0	2	0	0	7	10
Adult	0	3	1	5	0	0	1	10
Unknown	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	4
Total	62	50	41	35	25	24	77	314

Being beaten by family accounted for 19.75% (62/314) of all deaths of PWDD, and was the most common cause of death. Beating was defined by punching, kicking, or hitting someone using an object. Children four years of age or younger were most frequently killed in this manner. More specifically, 54.84% (34/62) of PWDD who were beaten to death were four-years of age or younger, and 77.42% (48/62) were nine years of age or younger. Children four-years of age or younger dominated the majority of acts causing death categories, with the exception of the poison category. Implicated individuals who beat a PWDD to death were most commonly charged with murder. Not enough information was available from the data to determine if the implicated individuals were actually convicted of these charges.

Shooting, defined by the lethal use of a firearm, was the second most common act causing death and accounted for 15.92% (50/314) of all deaths of PWDD. It accounted for 16.00% (8/50) of deaths of children four years of age or younger and seemed to dominate the 15 to 49 year old age group. Those implicated individuals, for whom information was available, were usually charged with murder.

Neglect was the third most common act causing death and pertained to the neglect of an individual's medical or nutritional needs. It accounted for 13.05% (41/314) of all deaths of PWDD. Of the total number of PWDD who died as a result of neglect, 31.71% (13/41) were four years of age or younger, 60.98% (25/41) were nine years of age or younger. The majority (33/41) of PWDD died as a result of starvation. The data indicate that seven cases of starvation resulted in a charge of manslaughter and eight had resulted in charges of murder.

The asphyxia category included death by suffocation, strangulation, smothering, and hanging. Thirty-five PWDD or 11.15% (35/314) died by means of asphyxia, 28.57% (10/35) were four years of age or younger and 45.71% (16/35) were nine years of age or younger. The majority of implicated individuals were charged with murder.

Burns were the fifth most common cause of death of PWDD, accounting for 7.96% (25/314) of all deaths. This category included death by fire, chemical burns, and scalding. The majority (20/25) of these deaths was due to fire. In eight cases involving death by fire, the implicated individual was charged with murder. In four additional cases, the charge was involuntary manslaughter. One case resulted in a charge of aggravated manslaughter.

Poisoning resulted in 7.64% (24/314) of deaths of PWDD. The "poisoned" category included PWDD who died as a result of gas or medication overdose. Fifty-four percent (13/24) of PWDD in this category died as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning. In all of these cases, the victim was killed by one of his or her parents. The child was usually left in a running car in an enclosed space. Six of these 13 cases resulted in murder-suicides, in which the parent also took his or her own life.

The "others" category consisted of those acts causing death that did not fall under any of the previous categories. These acts included, in part, death by drowning (16), stabbing (16), hyperthermia (5), and shaking (4). Individuals who died as a result of hyperthermia were usually left unattended by family members in a vehicle on a hot day. Death by shaking usually involved infants with developmental disabilities. For 27 deaths, no specific act causing death was identified.

Murder-Suicides

A total of 47 murder-suicide cases were found in this study. In murder-suicides, 30 males were implicated in the deaths of PWDD. Biological fathers (20) and mothers (16) were most frequently implicated in these deaths. Biological brothers (4), sisters (1), stepfathers (1), grandfathers (2), brother-in-laws (2), and a mother's boyfriend (1) were also implicated. Thirty-one PWDD were male, 16 were female. PWDD ranged in age from infancy to 72 years old. Twelve were 14 years of age or younger, six were under four years of age. The average age of victims, for whom this information was available, was 28.89 years with a median of 27.00 years. Shooting was the most common act reported, accounting for 31 deaths. Carbon monoxide poisoning resulted in six deaths.

Conviction and Sentencing Information

For most culpable homicide cases, no information was provided regarding the outcome of any criminal investigations. For some cases, conviction information was available. For others, only sentencing information was available. In a few cases both conviction and sentencing information was provided. Of the 93 cases for which conviction information was available, 35 family members were convicted of murder, 28 of manslaughter, three of child abuse, and 18 were acquitted. In nine additional cases, the only information provided indicated that the implicated individuals were convicted of a crime. Of the 86 cases for which sentencing information was available, 62 implicated individuals received some form of incarceration. Of these, one individual was sentenced to death and three to life in prison. Of the remaining cases, the average number of years incarceration was 10.71, with a median of 4.75 years.

Discussion

The media coverage of homicides of PWDD in this study represents only a sample of the total number of cases of homicides involving PWDD as victims. Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk (1998) found that the *Los Angeles Times* covered only 13.10 percent of all 9,442 homicide cases that occurred in Los Angeles County from 1990 to 1994. Child abuse literature also suggests that reported fatal abuse cases underestimate the actual number of children being killed. In a ten-year retrospective study of child abuse homicides, reclassification of these cases indicated that abuse homicides were under-reported by 61.6% (Herman-Giddens et al., 1999). The authors concluded that the original 2,973 abuse homicides of children 11 years of age or younger greatly underestimated the actual 9,467 abuse homicides which occurred between 1985 through 1996. These findings from both media and child homicide research would suggest that the number of PWDD who were included in this study might only represent a fraction of those actually killed. In addition, the number of PWDD who survive victimization may likely be much greater than those killed.

Sorenson, Peterson Manz, and Berk's (1998) study on news media coverage of homicide found that family members or intimates were implicated in 11.3% of cases in which the victim-suspect relationship was know. Victim-suspect relationships also included strangers, friends or acquaintances, and gang members. By comparison, intrafamilial homicides of PWDD represented 15.96% (314/1967) of overall homicides of PWDD obtained by the original study discussed in chapter two. By excluding caregivers (639/1967), government representatives (588/1967), and unknowns (184/1967) from the original study of homicides of PWDD, intrafamilial homicide would represent 56.47% (314/556) of overall homicides of PWDD. This may suggest that more stories are written about intrafamilial homicide of PWDD than people without developmental disabilities.

Results from this study found that parents were most frequently implicated in intrafamilial homicide cases followed by siblings and extended family members. Homicides implicating biological relatives were more prevalent than adoptive, step, or foster relations. These findings may generally be reflective of the greater caregiving roles taken on by parents and biological relations, or may suggest that news editors feel homicides implicating these individuals are more newsworthy.

Statistics Canada findings indicated that between 1984 and 1993, the average percentage of parent-child homicides of children under 12 years old, as a percentage of all homicide incidents, were 4.9%. This percentage increased to 7.1% for 1994 to 1998 (Fedorowycz, 2000). Parents were defined as biological or step-parents. Statistics Canada data on the victim-offender relationship focused on homicides committed by acquaintances, family, and strangers, and excluded unsolved homicide incidents. By comparison, results from this present study found that parents were implicated in 8.4% (165/1967) of homicides of CWDD under 12 years old as a percentage of all homicides of PWDD. When excluding caregivers (639/1967), government representatives (588/1967), and unknowns (184/1967) from the original database, and focusing only on biological and step-parents, these parents were implicated in 21.40% (119/556) homicides of CWDD younger than 12 years, as a percentage of all homicides of PWDD. While not conclusive, these findings suggest that CWDD may be at greater risk for filicide than children without disabilities living in Canada.

This study found a similar number of male and female victims reported in intrafamilial homicide stories. These results were not supported by other media research studies, which indicated more newspaper stories involved male victims (Sorenson, Peterson Manz, & Berk, 1998). The gender results from this present study were similar to findings from Richards' (2000) study on child homicide.

In this study, more homicide cases implicated mothers in the deaths of CWDD, especially daughters. This finding was supported by results from a study of 60 filicidal women, which found that, of the 76 children killed, 55% were female (Lewis, Baranoski, Buchanan, & Benedek, 1998). The present study also found that more stories were written about biological fathers killing their sons with developmental disabilities. In a study of paternal filicide, 10 fathers were responsible for the deaths of 13 children. Nine fathers killed their biological children. Seven children were girls (Marleau, Poulin, Webanck, Roy, & Laporte, 1999). Fathers have also been implicated in greater number of intrafamilial homicides of children in the 13-18 year age group (Kunz & Bahr, 1996).

In this study, twice as many stories concerned biological mothers then biological fathers killing CWDD four years of age or younger. While Pritchard and Hughes (1997) concluded that the news-worthiness of homicides increased when victims were children, research on child abuse also suggests that very young children are most at risk for being killed (Richards, 2000). Mothers have been more frequently implicated in the deaths of very young children (Lownestein, 1997), especially in the deaths of children during their first week of life (Kunz & Bahr, 1996).

This study found that acts causing death were diverse, with the majority of stories featuring PWDD dying as a result of being beaten, followed by shooting, neglect, asphyxia, burns, and poison. The majority of stories were written about CWDD four years of age and younger who were beaten. Child homicide research suggests that with infanticides, as the age of the victim increased, the level of violence used to kill the infant increased (Smithey, 1998). The author found that most victims died as a result of trauma to the head or body, supporting, in part, findings from the present study. The author noted that other causes of death included asphyxia, exposure, stabbing, gunshot, burns and neglect. Kunz and Bahr (1996) found that young children were most frequently killed by means of personal weapons, asphyxiation or drowning. As the age of victims increased, weapons mostly consisted of guns and knives. In a study of 60 filicidal women, one in four used a weapon, defined by a gun or knife during the homicide. Mothers presenting with psychosis were 11 times more likely to use a weapon than non-psychotic mothers. Weapons were more frequently used to kill older children. Most mothers (18) strangled or smothered their children. Eight mothers shot their children, eight beat them, seven stabbed them, and 19 used various other means to commit homicide (Lewis, Baranoski, Buchanan, & Benedek, 1998). Stabbing predominantly characterized the homicide of children killed by their fathers in one study (Marleau, Poulin, Webanck, Roy, & Laporte, 1999).

Factors contributing to the homicide of family members appear to be diverse. In the present study, biological mothers were implicated in the largest number of homicides of CWDD, especially of children four years of age or younger. In research on infanticide, young maternal age was found to be strongly associated with these acts, particularly if the mother had previously given birth (Overpeck, Brenner, Trumble, Trifiletti, & Berendes, 1998). McKee and Shea's (1998) findings on maternal infanticide suggested that these women were generally new or recent mothers under 30 years of age. Smithey (1997) suggested that economic deprivation and lack of interpersonal support were some other predisposing factors for mothers who killed their infants. Low socioeconomic status, poor social support networks, and conjugal stress have characterized filicidal fathers (Marleau, Poulin, Webanck, Roy, & Laporte, 1999).

Mental disorders may also explain why parents kill their children (McKee & Shea, 1998). The American Psychiatric Association (2000) has recognized that postpartum psychotic episodes, characterized by hallucinations to kill one's infant or delusions that one's infant is possessed, have most frequently been associated with infanticides. In a study of 60 filicidal women, 52% of mothers were incompetent to stand trial and 65% were found not guilty by reason of insanity (Lewis, Baranoski, Buchanan, & Benedek, 1998). In a study of 10 filicidal men, fathers were in part characterized by mental disorders defined by mood and personality, psychosis during the homicide, and history of substance abuse. In 60% of cases, the men also either killed or attempted to kill their spouses. In over 50% of cases, fathers attempted to commit suicide following the homicide (Marleau, Poulin, Webanck, Roy, & Laporte, 1999).

Perceived stress associated with childcare has been the focus of some studies regarding child abuse. In a study of emotional states of 23 mothers of infants with colic, 70% had explicit aggressive thoughts and fantasies and 26% had expressed thoughts of infanticide during their infants' colic episodes. Over 90% of mothers experienced significant marital tension and social contact disruption (Levitzky, & Cooper, 2000). Veltkamp and Miller (1994) found that families where children were abused generally had difficulty in coping with their perceived stress constructively. Ammerman's (1997) literature review on the role of child disability in the etiology of physical abuse found that child characteristics were secondary to parental and societal factors, with abuse precipitated by the interaction of these and other factors. Sobsey (1990; 1994) concluded that the three-stage model of disability, which focuses on the role of disability in creating family stress, which then results in the abuse of the family member with disabilities, was incorrect.

Quality of life concerns have played a role in some cases of intrafamilial homicide and murder-suicides. Marleau, Poulin, Webanck, Roy, and Laporte (1999) reported that for five out of 10 filicidal fathers in their study, altruism or wanting to protect their child from perceived suffering contributed in part to the parent's motivation for the homicide. Extended suicide, defined by the desire to kill oneself without wanting to leave one or more significant persons behind, featured strongly in six cases. Extended suicide and altruism together were motivators in three cases. In other murder-suicides, the death of PWDD has sometimes been justified on the basis that they have become too difficult to take care of (Corelli-Rae, 1998; LaSalle, 1995; Stober, December 20,1990). Richards' (2000) study on child homicides found that 3.2 % (13/403) of perpetrators rationalized their homicidal behaviour in terms of mercy. However, in the majority or 20.6% (83/403) of cases, a child was killed in order to remove a witness, such as during the commission of another crime. Anger at the child (18.4%) was the second most common rationale for homicide given by perpetrators.

Sobsey (1994) identified disruptions in attachment, consisting of characteristics associated with both the child and parent, as placing PWDD at risk for abuse. In particular, CWDD may present with impairments or delays in cognitive processing which affect social interaction and perception related to early attachment. Parental attitudes towards disability in general, and disability associated with their child specifically, may further impair the parent-child bond. Perceived stress associated with the diagnosis of a developmental disability at birth or in infancy, and the therapeutic role that parents may be asked to take on regarding their child's physiotherapy, behaviour management, and education, may also contribute to disruptions in attachment. Insufficient bonding may, in part, explain why some non-biological relations, such as live-in boyfriends, step-parents, foster parents, or adoptive siblings, were implicated in the homicides of PWDD. Richards (2000) found that children in foster care were particularly at risk if they had previously been removed from their foster home because of abuse or neglect concerns, and then returned to the same foster parents.

Distance theory may also explain why family members and others are killing PWDD. Distance theory suggests that it is less difficult, emotionally and psychologically, to kill someone, the greater the psychological distance between perpetrator and victim. One contributing factor that increases distance between perpetrator and victim is the perpetrator's belief in moral superiority, such as killing someone whose life is not worth preserving because they are evil or worthless (Grossman, 1995). Killing infants with developmental disabilities based on a utilitarian philosophy was proposed by Kuhse and Singer (1985), who suggested that these homicides were morally acceptable. A similar argument used in Nazi Germany resulted in the extermination of both children and adults with developmental disabilities (Wolfensberger, 1981).

Prevention

Sobsey's (1994) discussion on family abuse prevention strategies with high-risk families focused on teaching parents parenting skills, overcoming isolation of families, facilitating attachment between family members, and supporting parental relationships and family bonds. Additional prevention strategies focused on assisting families with substance abuse problems, supporting parents with special needs, and managing stress in families. Richards (2000) noted that strengthening laws to protect children when parental and child rights conflict and a willingness to terminate parental rights might further contribute to the health and welfare of children.

When working with foster or adoptive children, appropriate screening of potential parents could also assist in reducing the risk for child abuse. Reference and police background checks would be the first step in screening potential parents. Psychological assessment of personality functioning, in combination with assessment of parenting knowledge and attitudes, parent-child observation, and a detailed social history of potential parents, may help to identify those individuals who are more at risk for abuse. Psychometric measures assessing personality functioning include the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) (Green, 1991), the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III (MCMI-III) (Millon, 1997), and the Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI) (Morey, 1996). Measures assessing parenting knowledge and attitudes include the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI), Child Abuse Potential

Inventory (CAP Inventory), and the Parenting Stress Index (PSI). A description of these measures can be found at http://www.psychtest.com/.

Conclusion

There has been an increasing interest in crimes against PWDD over the past decade. However, little attention has been given to intrafamilial homicide of PWDD. This present study was undertaken to provide a preliminary look at intrafamilial homicides of PWDD. The results from this study were supported in part by the literature on media research on homicide and findings from research on intrafamilial and child homicide. A greater number of news stories were written about PWDD who died as a result of being beaten, shot, neglected, asphyxiated, burned and poisoned. Intrafamilial homicide stories also focused more on biological mothers who were implicated in the homicides of family members. Stories featuring biological mothers killing daughters, and biological fathers killing sons, were also found to be prevalent. Fewer homicide stories focused on non-biological relatives, siblings, or extended family as perpetrators of homicide of PWDD. The similarities of these findings with intrafamilial and child homicide research suggests that, aside from these stories being considered newsworthy, they also generally reflect the characteristics of intrafamilial homicides of PWDD in society.

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Running head: PWCP IN HOMICIDE NEWS

Chapter IV

Portrayals of People with Cerebral Palsy in Homicide News

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The research described in this study was conducted with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. [Award no. 752-98-1229]. The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities provided additional support for this project through a sub-grant from Temple University's Institute on Disability. The opinions expressed in this study represent only those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funding agencies.

Abstract

Through content analysis, employing qualitative and quantitative methods, Canadian media representation of people with cerebral palsy (PWCP) in public life was examined. Canadian NewsDisc, an online biographic database service, was used to examined the use of stigmatizing language such as *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffers from*, or *suffering from* within the context of cerebral palsy. Between January 1994 and December 2000, 3939 media stories indexed included the term *cerebral palsy*. Stigmatizing language was significantly more frequently used within the context of homicide and cerebral palsy. In 94.74% of media stories, the terms *mercy killing* or *euthanasia* were used within the context of Tracy Latimer's homicide. While the Latimer case provided an extreme example of the media associating stigmatizing terms with the killing of PWCP, the same association was made in other cases. Results from this study are discussed in terms of self-categorization theory, media effect, and factors associated with discrimination against PWCP.

Portrayals of People with Cerebral Palsy in Homicide News

> What is communicated by the mass media is not simply artistic expression. It is a representation of a society's beliefs, values, traditions – of its whole way of life. The media both reflect our culture and help to mould it; they select and interpret for us. They provide us with a framework of understanding; they produce our reality for us. (Vipond, 2000, p. 88)

Over the past decade, Canadians have been presented with issues such as assisted suicide, euthanasia, and compassionate homicide as humane solutions to living with a disability. Public and media interest in people like Sue Rodriguez, Larry James McAfee, Tracy Latimer, and Ryan Wilkieson, individuals with disabilities, who have been associated with these issues, has contributed to public, legislative, and legal discussions concerning the health, welfare, and quality of life of people with disabilities. While the precise impact that the media has had on public opinion and behaviour is difficult to determine, research suggests that the media has had some effects in shaping public life (Taras, 1999).

Russell (1994) commented on the language used by reporters, which can distort objectivity and reality. Bias in language not only conveys meanings, but also emotions. Sensationalism in journalism, sometimes used to encourage a public response, may further distort reality. The headline, "The nightmare of coping with kids who aren't normal," for example, appeared in *The Province* (Vancouver) in conjunction with four children who had disabilities and were killed by their parents (Tait, 1997). The clear message that children with disabilities are *abnormal* and that caring for them is a nightmare for their parents might have been quite different if neutral language had been used by the editor.

Terminology used by the media to describe people with developmental disabilities (PWDD) may be reflective of media attitudes, general public attitudes, or both. While it is difficult to discern what influences specified descriptors have on public attitudes regarding PWDD, history suggests that labels have contributed at least to some degree toward their depersonalization. During the Third Reich, for example, describing PWDD as "useless eaters" suggested that they were expensive to care for (Gallager, 1995), and emphasized their differences from the rest of society. Seidelman (1992) notes that, during the Nazi regime, medical terminology became less personalized in order to facilitate acceptability of killing PWDD. Depersonalizing PWDD contributes to their being treated differently by society than others are. This treatment has sometimes included forced sterilization, mercy killing, euthanasia, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, denial of medical treatment, involuntary medical experimentation, and homicide (Sobsey, 1994; Sobsey, Wells, Lucardie & Mansell, 1995).

In examining issues in the communication process, Jensen (1997) observed that greater sensitivity is needed to address possible ethical concerns related to language usage. Jensen notes that figurative language, "can capture attention, simplify the complex, make concrete the abstract, and foster visualization" (p. 125). The author points out that medical metaphors are frequently used in public discourse to describe societal problems, with speakers generally portrayed as wanting to remedy the situation. Medical metaphors such as "afflicted with" or "suffering from," when referring to a disorder or disease or when describing PWDD, construct the person's situation as distressing, and in need of being cured or fixed in some way.

Many English language editorial style guides stress the importance of avoiding such bias when describing people with disabilities. The American Psychological Association's publication manual (1994) recommends avoiding language equating people with disabilities and their condition with superfluous or negative overtones, and language regarded as a slur. The Editors' Association of Canada (2000), a national organization of over one thousand English- and French-language editors, states that "depressing clichés can unnecessarily emphasize the pathetic-victim picture of disability" (p. 112). The association suggests that neutral terms such as "affected by" or "affect with" are preferable to "afflicted with," "stricken by," or "suffered from," when describing people with disabilities. Tasko's (1999) *Canadian Press stylebook* suggests that writers should strive for accuracy, clarity, and sensitivity when describing people with disabilities. The author stresses specificity and the danger of generalizations: "Afflicted with suggests pain and suffering. It doesn't always apply. Nor does suffering" (p.20). Federal media guidelines for the fair portrayal of people with disabilities, distributed by Human Resources and Development Canada (1996), stress that "references which cause discomfort, guilt, pity or insult, should be avoided. Words like "suffers from…stricken with…afflicted by…patient…disease… [or] sick suggest constant pain and a sense of hopelessness" (p. 2). The *Globe and Mail* style book points out that many people with disabilities dislike expressions like sufferer, suffers from, and afflicted, and suggests that their wishes should be respected by writers (McFarlane & Clements, 1998). In spite of the general prohibition of such expressions by media guidelines, these expressions remain a part of our informal language and can be found in many media stories.

This study was undertaken to determine how often the media uses some of these stigmatizing or biased expressions to represent people with disabilities who are victims of homicide or attempted homicide as compared to when they are discussed in other news stories. For the purpose of this study, we restricted our focus from people with disabilities in general to people with cerebral palsy (PWCP) in order to allow reliable story selection criteria. Similarly, we operationally defined biased or stigmatizing language as the use of some of the specific descriptors consistently prohibited by media guidelines. These include *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffers from*, and *suffering from*. Our operational definition of stigmatizing language to these specific terms clearly results in underestimation of bias, however, it also allows objective, reliable measurement, and minimizes subjectivity, thereby allowing direct quantitative comparison of the various groups of news stories.

It is hypothesized that the media uses more stigmatizing language when providing coverage of homicides of PWCP than when PWCP are discussed in other news stories. Homicide is defined as the killing of one person by another, either directly or indirectly, by any means. Homicide is either culpable, such as in murder, manslaughter, or infanticide, or not culpable, such as in self-defence (Rodrigues, 1994). This hypothesis is based on three theoretical considerations. First, if media stereotype victims of crime, they would be likely to generalize victimization to the person's disability. Thus, the person's victim status may be generalized as a characteristic of the individual not the circumstance. This construct of the victim's role portrays the individual as a "victim of disability" and a victim of crime.

Second, depersonalization of people with disabilities suggests that the "pathetic-victim" role may sometimes be used to explain, justify, and even excuse crimes against them. In the extreme form, the portrayal of homicide victims with disabilities may be used to justify their killing as "mercy killing" or "compassionate homicide." In a less extreme form, the loss of a life that is presented as being of lesser value is viewed as a less serious crime since it is presented as the destruction of "damaged merchandise" (Sobsey, 1994).

Third, in some cases, the elimination of suffering is presented as the actual defense against criminal charges of homicide. In such cases, the notion of suffering is emphasized by the defense in the courtroom, and in some cases, the defense may attempt to employ the media to build public sentiment in favor of their client in hope of influencing the outcome of the case. If and when such press manipulation occurs, press coverage might be expected to reflect such deliberately injected stereotypes. By associating disability with suffering or affliction, and homicide with compassion or mercy, one conclusion that may be drawn by readers is that death is preferable to living with a disability.

It is further hypothesized that the media emphasizes mercy killing and euthanasia over other categories of homicide when reporting homicides of PWCP. While homicide is a common cause of death for people with cerebral palsy, most cases appear to receive minimal attention. While formal research is scarce, one study reported that of 732 children with cerebral palsy who died, only 23 (3.1%) had autopsies (Evans, & Alberman, 1991). Another reported that of 24 autopsies completed on children with cerebral palsy, 6 (25%) established the cause of death as homicide by a parent (Bunai, Komoriya, & Ohya, 1998). As a result, it is likely that the many homicides of people with cerebral palsy go undetected. Even when reported, however, most violence against people with disabilities appears to receive little media attention. For example, Project Censored, which identifies the 25 most important stories each year that have been ignored by the mainstream media lists the reporting of high rates of violent crime against people with disabilities as one of the most underreported stories for the year 2000 (Roth, 2001).

Lastly, it is hypothesized that stigmatizing language labels will be used more frequently in news stories about the homicide of Tracy Latimer. Goyette (1994a; 1994b), Canadian Press (1995), and Rielly (2001) commented on the perceived media bias emphasizing Robert Latimer's claims of mercy regarding his actions that resulted in the death of his daughter Tracy. Media emphasis of a father's rationale in killing his daughter and framing his actions as merciful may, in part, suggest a degree of justification for his behavior. The homicide of Tracy Latimer, a child with cerebral palsy killed by her father on October 24,1993 by means of carbon monoxide poisoning, continues to receive widespread national media attention in 2001. Her death, her father's trials, appeals, interviews, editorials, demonstrations by supporters, public debates, and other related events have kept the story in the news for more than eight years.

On November 16, 1994, Robert Latimer was convicted of second-degree murder, however, a new trial was ordered by the Supreme Court. On November 5, 1997, Robert Latimer was again convicted of second-degree murder but granted an exemption from a mandatory penalty and sentenced to two years less a day. On November 23, 1998, the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal imposed a mandatory life sentence with no chance of parole for 10 years ("Saskatchewan farmer," 2000). Legal defense of Robert Latimer's actions equated the homicide of his daughter with an act of mercy or compassion as a means to prevent her suffering (Blatchford, 2000; Tibbetts, 2000). While other unrelated defense tactics (e.g., asking the courts to deny admissibility of his confession) were also presented in the courtroom, these received little attention in the press. On January 19, 2001, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed the appeals against conviction and sentence, and ruled that Robert Latimer must serve a life sentence ("Latimer begins life sentence," 2001; "Murder is the most serious crime," 2001). Following his imprisonment, Mr. Latimer's supporters organized a massive petition drive requesting the government to invoke a rarely used Royal Prerogative of Mercy to effectively nullify the Supreme Court's decision and release Mr. Latimer.

This study focuses on homicidal violence, PWCP, and the Canadian news media. Any generalizations of this study's findings to non-Canadian media coverage, people with other disabilities, or crimes other than homicide remains speculative pending further research that might extend or limit the findings. This study will use quantitative content analysis to examine the use of stigmatizing language in news stories of homicides of PWCP. Focus will be given to media coverage of the homicide of Tracy Latimer to determine if this specific measure of media bias regarding stigmatizing language labels is consistent with other media analyses that report bias concerning this case.

Method

Content analysis is a "research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories" (Wright, 1986, p. 125) that was used to examine media stories about cerebral palsy. Krippendorff (1980) explained that its purpose is to "provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of 'facts,' and a practical guide to action" (p. 21). Content analysis may be used to examine the existence of bias in literature (Gay, 1987). This research method has recently been used by researchers to examine media coverage of people with disabilities (Gilbert, MacCauley, & Smale, 1997; Gold & Auslander, 1999; Haller, 2000; Maas & Hasbrook, 2001).

Advantages of content analysis are that it is inexpensive, unobtrusive, and allows the researcher to examine a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time. It also allows longitudinal examination of a given topic (Babbie, 1999; Berger, 1998). Disadvantages of content analysis stem from potential difficulties with representative sampling (Berger, 1998). Berger noted that studying a sizable amount of content is one means to address this disadvantage. This study will examine Canadian media's use of the term cerebral palsy from 1994 to 2000.

Content analysis can employ qualitative methods, quantitative methods, or a combination of the two (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Qualitative content analysis allows more detailed interpretation of specific text passages. Quantitative content analysis provides more objective analysis of specific characteristics of a sample, but lacks the richness of detail available through qualitative analysis. In this study, quantitative content analysis is used as the primary tool for testing hypotheses. This analysis is supplemented by examples from selected articles that illustrate some of the thematic qualities relevant to those hypotheses.

Cerebral palsy is defined as a group of disorders characterized by motor or postural delays associated with injuries to the brain during prenatal, perinatal, or postnatal events (Ratanawongsa, 2001). Classic presentation of cerebral palsy includes spasticity, seizures, muscle contractions, difficulty sucking or feeding, irregular breathing, delayed motor development, mental retardation, impairments in speech, vision, and hearing, progressive joint contractures, and limited range of motion (WebMD, 2001).

Cerebral palsy is also a developmental disability, defined by Kiernan and Schalock (1995) as any neurological condition, affecting either mental or physical functioning or both, that begins prior to 18 years of age. The condition is chronic, meaning that the person will likely have this condition for the duration of his or her lifetime. The term developmental disability emphasizes a person's functional capacity, with impairment or significant functional limitations, defined by the amount of assistance required to perform activities, identified in three or more areas including self-care, both receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity of independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. For the purpose of this study, the use of the descriptor cerebral palsy in a news story was the sole criterion for inclusion.

Canadian NewsDisc, an online bibliographic database service was used to conduct this study. It provides full text media articles of every column and feature published by a selected group of major Canadian newspapers from 1994 to the present, and transcripts from the CBC and CTV News and Current Affairs. However, not all news sources included in Canadian NewsDisc are included for the same years. For example, at the time this study was conducted, the *Edmonton Journal* dated back to 1994 while the *Victoria Times Colonist* dated back only to July 31, 1998.

Searches on Canadian NewsDisc were conducted using key words as search terms. The term *cerebral palsy* was used to identify stories of interest. This term was combined with different homicide terms to determine what percentage of overall stories on cerebral palsy also focused on specific acts, homicide or attempted homicide. Search terms used to obtain information on homicide included *homicide*, *murder*, *manslaughter*, *mercy killing*, and *euthanasia*. The term *cerebral palsy* was combined with other specified terms like *inclusion, education, health, medicine, sport,* and *athlete* to identify topical stories about PWCP that were not related to crime. Searches using homicide terms and other specified terms were mutually exclusive. This approach resulted in a third or "other" category of stories that focused on cerebral palsy but not homicide or specified terms, which represented topical stories not reflective of content obtained by the before-mentioned terms. These search strategies produced three groups: (1) stories related to homicide, (2) stories related to a specific list of non-crime topics, and (3) other stories that included all other topics including an unknown number of crime stories in which people with cerebral palsy could be portrayed as victims of non-homicidal crimes.

The use of bias in language in media stories about PWCP was examined by combining the term *cerebral palsy* with the terms *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering from*, and *suffers from*. The results were combined with the terms for homicide and other specified terms to determine what percentage of stories about cerebral palsy and homicide, and cerebral palsy and other specified terms, featured these descriptors.

During searches, the term *and* was used to combine terms together, and *or* was used to join alternative terms. The researchers attempted to reduce the number of cross-referenced stories by using the term *not* to exclude certain terms. For example, the search command *cerebral palsy and homicide not inclusion* would obtain all stories which included the terms *cerebral palsy* and *homicide*, while excluding any stories which included the term *inclusion*.

Due to the limitations of this database, parameters could not be set to limit the occurrence of combined key terms from occurring within a specified number of words from each other. Therefore, results from the searches using the different terms for homicide not only include stories about the homicide of people with cerebral palsy but also included the following kinds of stories:

1. Two or more events covered in the same story, one of which may focus on homicide while the other is on cerebral palsy, with no connection between the two events; or
2. A fictional account of a homicide and a person with cerebral palsy (e.g., a novel, stage play, or movie depicting a homicide); or

3. The death of a person with cerebral palsy who wrote about the topic such as euthanasia or mercy killing.

This sampling limitation was, in part, compensated for by the large amount of data collected. A reliability check was performed to determine what percentage of stories found by our data-base search method focused specifically on the topic of cerebral palsy and homicide not the three types kinds of stories previously discussed. A random sample of 100 stories was examined in detail for content. Ten random stories per publication year were chosen for 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2000. Twenty random samples were chosen for the 1994, 1995, and 1997 publication years because of the greater number of stories about cerebral palsy and homicide written during these years.

Chi-square test for goodness of fit, a nonparametric test of significance, was used to compare observed frequencies in the study with proportions expected. Gay (1987) notes that chi-square was appropriate for data, "in the form of frequency counts occurring in two or more mutually exclusive categories" (p. 397). Chi-square values increase as the differences between observed and expected frequencies increase. Rejection of the null hypothesis is suggested if a chi-square value is significantly large. "The null hypothesis specifies the proportion (or percentage) of the population in each category" (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1988, p. 418). Significance is determined by selecting an alpha level, typically set at $p \leq .05$ or $p \leq .01$. An alpha level of $p \leq .01$ was chosen to reduce the risk of a Type I error and demonstrate a significant treatment effect. For this study, the null hypothesis states that the frequency distribution of biased language in media stories about PWCP is not different from the distribution of biased language in media stories about homicide or stories about other specified terms and PWCP.

Results

Between January 1994 and December 2000, 3939 media stories were indexed in Canadian NewsDisc, which included the term *cerebral palsy*. Of these stories, 20.18% (795/3939) included homicide terms (*homicide*, *murder*, *manslaughter*, *mercy killing* and *euthanasia*), 31.68% (1248/3939) included a selected group of topics (inclusion, education, health, medicine, sport, athlete), and 48.13% (1896/3939) focused on neither homicide or the selected topics. The homicide and selected term categories were mutually exclusive. Table 1 lists these three categories of news stories.

Table 1

Cerebral Palsy Combined with Specified Terms Sorted by Descriptors

	A/S	%	No A/S	%	N	Total %
CP + Homicide Terms	435	54.72%	360	45.28%	795	100.00%
CP + Selected Terms	232	18.59%	1016	81.41%	1248	100.00%
CP + Other Terms	417	21.99%	1479	78.01%	1896	100.00%
N	1084	27.52%	2855	72.48%	3939	100.00%

CP = cerebral palsy
Homicide Terms = homicide or murder or manslaughter or mercy killing or euthanasia **not** Selected Terms
Selected Terms = inclusion or education or health or medicine or sport or athlete **not** Homicide Terms
Other Terms = cerebral palsy **not** Homicide Terms **not** Selected Terms
A/S = afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from
No A/S = no use of the terms afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from

As seen in Table 1, 27.52% (1084/3939) of all stories which included the term *cerebral palsy* used prohibited descriptors such as *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering from*, and *suffers from*. These descriptors were found in 54.75% (435/795) of stories which included homicide terms, 18.59% (232/1248) of stories about other selected topics, and 21.99% (417/1896) of stories about content other than homicide and selected topics. Chi-square analysis, X^2 (2, N = 3939) = 373.740, p < .0001) indicated that these descriptors were significantly more frequently used in stories which included different homicide terms than stories with other content.

A reliability check was performed to ensure that the stories obtained by our electronic searches actually referred to the designated categories. A random selection of 100 of the 795 articles found by combining the term *cerebral palsy* and homicide terms resulted in an overall reliability of 93.00%. The year-by-year reliability ranged from 70.00% for 1999 to 100.00% for four of the eight years. Of the three articles found in 1999 that did not deal directly with cerebral palsy and homicide as a crime, two focused on a theatrical play and one article was a combination of two stories; one dealt with murder and the other with cerebral palsy, with no relationship between the two stories. This reliability represents the inclusion of articles. It is uncertain what articles were excluded by this sampling method that may have addressed the topic but were not retrieved. For example, the search terms *Robert* and *Latimer* may have excluded stories referring to Bob Latimer or Latimer. Because the goal of this study was to identify an appropriate not-all-inclusive sample, this sampling limitation was not addressed or corrected. Correction of this sampling limitation would have resulted in a greater number of subjective decisions and judgements concerning sampling, hindering replication.

As seen in Table 2, 800 of the 3939 media stories included the terms *cerebral palsy* and *Robert* and/or *Tracy Latimer*. Of these stories, 80.75% (646/800) featured homicide terms, suggesting that these terms were predominantly used to refer to Tracy Latimer's homicide or Robert Latimer's trial for the death of his daughter. Descriptors such as *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering from*, and *suffers from* were observed in 58.38% (467/800) of stories that included the terms *cerebral palsy* and *Robert* and/or *Tracy Latimer*. These descriptors were evident in 59.44% (384/646) of stories using homicide terms. This suggests that the majority of stories concerning Tracy Latimer's homicide used the descriptors *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering from*, and *suffers from* as contextual information in combination with the term *cerebral palsy*.

Table 2

Cerebral Palsy Combined with Specified Terms and the Terms Robert and/or Tracy Latimer Sorted by Descriptors

	A/S	%	No A/S	%	N	Total %
CP + Homicide Terms + R/T	384	59.44%	262	40.56%	646	100.00%
CP + Selected Terms + R/T	5	33.33%	10	66.67%	15	100.00%
CP + Other Terms + R/T	78	56.12%	61	43.88%	139	100.00%
N	467	58.38%	333	41.63%	800	100.00%

CP = cerebral palsy
R/T = Robert and Latimer or Tracy and Latimer
Homicide Terms = homicide or murder or manslaughter or mercy killing or euthanasia **not** Selected Terms
Selected Terms = inclusion or education or health or medicine or sport or athlete **not** Homicide Terms
Other Terms = cerebral palsy **not** Homicide Terms **not** Selected Terms
A/S = afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from
No A/S = no use of the terms afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from

Of the 3139 stories featuring the terms *cerebral palsy*, not *Robert* and/or *Tracy Latimer*, 4.75% (149/3139) included homicide terms, 39.28% (1233/3139) included selected terms, and 55.97% (1757/3139) included terms other than homicide or selected terms (see Table 3). The descriptors *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering* *from*, and *suffers from* were observed in 19.66% of stories which included the terms *cerebral palsy* not *Robert* and/or *Tracy Latimer*. These stigmatizing descriptors were evident in 34.23% (51/149) of stories which included *cerebral palsy* and homicide terms, 18.41% (227/1233) of stories about selected topics, and 19.29% (339/1757) of stories about content other than homicide and selected topics. Chi-square analysis, X^2 (2, N = 3139) = 21.392, p < .0001) indicated that these descriptors were significantly more frequently used in stories featuring the term *cerebral palsy* and homicide terms than stories which included selected terms or terms other than homicide or selected terms.

Table 3

Cerebral Palsy Combined with Specified Terms Excluding the Terms Robert and/or Tracy Latimer Sorted by Descriptors

	A/S	%	no A/S	%	N	Total %
CP + Homicide Terms not R/T	51	34.23%	98	65.77%	149	100.00%
CP + Selected Terms not R/T	227	18.41%	1006	81.59%	1233	100.00%
CP + Other Terms not R/T	339	19.29%	1418	80.71%	1757	100.00%
N	617	19.66%	2522	80.34%	3139	100.00%

CP = cerebral palsy
R/T = Robert and Latimer or Tracy and Latimer
Homicide Terms = homicide or murder or manslaughter or mercy killing or euthanasia **not** Selected Terms
Selected Terms = inclusion or education or health or medicine or sport or athlete **not** Homicide Terms
Other Terms = cerebral palsy **not** Homicide Terms **not** Selected Terms
A/S = afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from
No A/S = no use of the terms afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from

Combining the terms *cerebral palsy* with *mercy killing* and/or *euthanasia*, not *homicide*, *murder* or *manslaughter* or selected terms resulted in 474 media stories (see Table 4). This finding suggested that 59.62% (474/795) of stories which included the terms *cerebral palsy* and homicide (*homicide*, *murder*, *manslaughter*, *mercy killing*, *euthanasia*) focused on cerebral palsy, mercy killing and/or euthanasia. In 94.73% (449/474) the terms *mercy killing* and/or *euthanasia* were used within the context of Tracy Latimer's death. Of these stories, 59.92% (284/474) used the stigmatizing descriptors *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering from*, and *suffers from*. In

94.73% (449/474) of stories, the terms *cerebral palsy*, *mercy killing* and/or *euthanasia*, and *Robert* and/or *Tracy Latimer* were included within the context of the story. In 61.02% (274/449) of these stories, the stigmatizing descriptors *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffering from*, and *suffers from* were used. The stigmatizing descriptors were present in 40.00% (10/25) of stories about cerebral palsy and mercy killing and/or euthanasia when reference to Tracy Latimer's death was excluded.

Table 4

Cerebral Palsy Combined with Mercy Killing or Euthanasia Sorted by Descriptors

	A/S	%	no A/S	%	N	Total %
CP + M/E + R/T	274	61.02%	175	38.98%	449	100.00%
CP + M/E not R/T	10	40.00%	15	60.00%	25	100.00%
N	284	59.92%	190	40.08%	474	100.00%

CP = cerebral palsy
M/E = mercy killing or euthanasia **not** (homicide, murder, or manslaughter) not Selected Terms
R/T = Robert and Latimer or Tracy and Latimer
Selected Terms = inclusion or education or health or medicine or sport or athlete **not** Homicide Terms
A/S = afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from
No A/S = no use of the terms afflicted by or afflicted with or suffered from or suffers from or suffering from

Discussion

Media representation of PWCP in public life varied from topics of inclusion, education, health, medicine and sports, to homicide of PWCP. While media coverage of homicides of PWCP accounted for only 20.18% (795/3939) of overall coverage of cerebral palsy, 80.75% (646/800) of that coverage was in reference to the death of Tracy Latimer. The terms *mercy killing* and/or *euthanasia* in combination with *cerebral palsy* were most commonly associated with the death of Tracy Latimer, accounting for 94.73% (449/474) of stories.

Stigmatizing language, through the use of such prohibited terms as *afflicted by, afflicted with, suffered from, suffers from or suffering from* within the context of cerebral palsy was observed in 27.52% (1084/3939) of media stories. While these descriptors were used by the media for a variety of topics, they were twice as frequently used within the context of cerebral palsy and homicide, accounting for 54.72% (360/795) of homicide coverage. Stigmatizing language was observed in 59.44% (384/646) of media stories which referenced the death of Tracy Latimer within the context of homicide and cerebral palsy, and 61.02% (274/449) of media coverage within the context of mercy killing and/or euthanasia and cerebral palsy. Importantly, stigmatizing language accounted for 34.23% (51/149) of media stories which excluded reference to Tracy Latimer's death within the context of homicide, and 40.00% (10/15) of stories within the context of mercy killing and/or euthanasia. This suggests that while the Latimer case provided an extreme example of the media associating the use of prohibited terms with the killing of PWCP, the same association was made in other cases

Self-categorization theory addresses group membership based on social identity and shared beliefs. "The more accessible the particular shared conception of social identity, the more individuals depersonalize their self-perception and view themselves as group members" (Bar-Tal, 2000, p. 5). By perpetuating portrayals of PWCP as suffering and their deaths as acts of mercy, as illustrated by the numerous articles written between 1994 and 2000 about Tracy Latimer's 1993 homicide and the prominence of television news coverage by *CTV-News*, *Canada-AM* and CBC's *The National* (Mansbridge, 2001; Matheson, 2001; Robertson, 2001), the media appear to be contributing to a particular shared conception of social identity, which may further contribute to shared expectation of agreement among individuals in society.

Bar-Tal (2000) notes that disagreement within the group, such as society, about beliefs that should be consensual may result in group members exerting social influence through persuasion and negotiation in order to establish consensus. Society's response to perceived injustice for Robert Latimer appears significant. The media's role in contributing to public reaction to Tracy's death can be seen in their mobilization of support for or against Robert Latimer. Dr. Gifford Jones, a nationally syndicated columnist, wrote in support of Robert Latimer and against the Supreme Court's decision to incarcerate him a second time. The columnist requested readers to write letters of support for Latimer, which would be personally delivered to the Prime Minister and Governor General if enough were received (Jones, 2001a). This request resulted in several thousand letters of support (Jones, 2001b). The public was asked to telephone or email *Daily News Hotline* to express their opinions about Robert Latimer's motivation for killing his daughter (Bornais, 2001). Opinion polls were overwhelmingly supportive of

Robert Latimer and felt that he was unfairly treated by the judicial system (Korstanje, 1994; Perreaux, 2001).

Apart from public reaction directly associated with news media, media coverage of Tracy Latimer's death and her father's subsequent trials further stimulated the public into action resulting in more media coverage. A trust fund was set up to assist Robert Latimer with his legal costs, with donations ranging from $10 to $1,000 (Canadian Press, 1994). His legal defense fund was expected to surpass $100,000 with newspapers directing readers as to where their donations could be sent (Perreaux, 1997). New Democratic Party Member of Parliament, Svend Robinson, advocate of legalized assisted suicide, expressed his intention to raise the issue of mercy killing in the House of Parliament ("NDP's Robinson," 2001). Supporters of Robert Latimer initiated a ribbon campaign ("Supporters of Latimer," 2001), candlelight vigil outside the Supreme Court in Ottawa (Laflamme, 2001), and volunteered to serve time on his behalf (Bailey, 2001; Naumetz, 2001) to encourage the government to release him from incarceration. In response, Prime Minister Jean Chretien stated that the government would not make a decision about Robert Latimer's sentencing without parole board recommendations (Perreaux, 2001). Perreaux noted that through the Royal Prerogative of Mercy, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Solicitor General is given the authority to investigate applications. Public consumption of media's construction associating cerebral palsy with suffering and homicide with mercy may in part have contributed to public reaction in support of Robert Latimer and associating his incarceration with injustice.

The use of biased descriptors, such as *suffering from cerebral palsy,* has a special implication within the context of the debate on the appropriateness of the Latimer conviction and sentencing, and the larger debate on mercy killing. These debates revolve in part on whether the individual who was killed was suffering or not. The uses of descriptions that make suffering an inherent characteristic of the person's disability clearly bias the debate. Arguing that someone who *suffered from* cerebral palsy was not *suffering* seems illogical since we have already accepted the fact of suffering with the description.

While the use of such prejudicial terminology is perhaps the most easily demonstrated aspect of a much larger pattern of bias in the coverage of this homicide, it is hardly the only indicator of bias. While it would go beyond the scope of this article to report on all of the examples of biased reporting in this case, two prominent examples are presented here. First, Tracy Latimer was frequently described as having severe, unrelenting pain from a dislocated hip, that doctors could not be treat with medication (e.g., Henton, 1997: Jones, 2001a). Second, Robert Latimer was portrayed as an honest, law abiding farmer who had never been in trouble with the law and who openly admitted and defended his actions (e.g., Jenish, 1994). Neither of these claims were true. Written records from the months, weeks, and days before her killing repeatedly describe Tracy Latimer as a "happy" girl with occasional discomfort. While it is true that her hip was causing her some significant pain, doctors at her trial testified that Tracy could have been given stronger medication to control the pain. They testified that this would have been a good short-term solution but that the best long-term solution to eliminate her pain was surgery. The claim that Tracy could not be treated with more powerful pain medication was not made by a physician, but rather by Mark Brayford, Mr. Latimer's defense attorney (Sobsey, 2001a).

The portrayal of Mr. Latimer as an honest and law-abiding farmer also appeared to have little basis in fact. Mr. Latimer lied to his family and to police about Tracy's death. He burned evidence and tried to have his daughter's body cremated before the actual cause of death could be discovered. He confessed only when there was overwhelming evidence pointing toward his guilt and only then suggested that he had acted from compassion. The statements that he gave police and the press that suggest that he killed his daughter out of love still have apparent contradictions in them. While he gave statements to the press, he refused to testify in court where his statements might be cross-examined and, even after conviction, he tried to have his confession ruled inadmissible (e.g., Sobsey. 1995). In addition, in portraying Mr. Latimer as a law-abiding farmer who had never been in trouble before, most of the mainstream media systematically ignored his previous record. This included convictions for "drunk driving, for refusing to provide a breathalyzer sample and for possession of a narcotic" (Ouston, 1997, p. A1). It also included the successful appeal of a conviction for raping a 15-year-old girl in 1974. "The conviction was overturned on appeal because of errors in the judge's charge to jurors -- what some might call a technicality" (Ouston, 1997, p. A1).

The portrayal, by some members of the media, of the killing of Tracy Latimer as a justifiable act of mercy, based on the argument that she was suffering, may also have resulted in copycat crimes. Surette (1998) observes that:

> For a crime to be a copycat crime it must have been inspired by an earlier, publicized crime – that is, there must be a pair of crimes linked by the media. The perpetrator of a copycat crime must have been exposed to the publicity about the original crime and must have incorporated major elements of that crime into his or her crime. The choice of victim, the motivation, or the technique in a copycat crime must have been lifted from the earlier, publicized crime. (p. 137)

Research and literature findings on media and social aggression, suicide, aggregate crime rates, copycat crime, and terrorism indicate that, while media affects crime rates, it is difficult to discern exactly what that effect is (Surette, 1998). Surette notes that it has been easier to demonstrate that media coverage has influence on how people predisposed to committing criminal behaviour commit crimes than on whether the media portrayals actually trigger criminal behaviour. Nevertheless, it appears that intermediate and interactive factors play a role in media influence on future crimes. These variables include:

> Reward or lack of punishment for the perpetrator, portrayal of violence as justified, portrayal of the consequences of violence in a way that does not stir distaste, portrayal of violence without critical commentary, the presence of live peer models of violence, and the presence of sanctioning adults. This effect depends on the combined influence of social context, media context, and media content interacting with characteristics of the audience. (p. 152)

Surette concludes that the greater the consumer's reliance on the media for information about his or her society and environment and the greater his or her predisposition to behave criminally, the greater the effect. While it is not implied that most citizens are driven to murder by media exposure, it is suggested that for a few individuals, their predisposition and exposure to realistic media models of dysfunctional behavior may, to some degree, result in the imitation of dysfunctional behavior.

In the media coverage of the Latimer case, many of the previously mentioned variables appeared to be present. Results from this study established that media coverage of Tracy Latimer's death was extensive and that this coverage predominantly presented her death as a mercy killing and euthanasia. Tracy's condition was also frequently associated with stigmatizing descriptors *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffers from* or *suffering from* rather than neutral terms. These findings are consistent with Surette's justification factor.

Robert Latimer was convicted of second-degree versus first-degree murder despite the fact that Tracy's homicide was planned (Canadian Press, 1997; Henton, 1997). The Criminal Code of Canada defines first-degree murder as planned and deliberate. Murder may be reduced to manslaughter if the perpetrator who committed the murder acted in the heat of passion caused by sudden provocation (Rodrigues, 1994). A conviction of second-degree murder may suggest that Tracy's premeditated homicide is perceived as less serious that other premeditated homicides. These attributes appear consistent with Surette's minimal consequence factor.

Robert Latimer's legal defense suggested that Tracy's death was an act of love by a father who cared too much for his daughter to see her suffer through a life of pain, and who wanted to prevent further suffering from future surgery (Tibbetts, 2000). This study demonstrates that media coverage of Tracy Latimer's death was biased and emphasized suffering. Although it was overturned on appeal, the precedent-setting sentence of Robert Latimer to two years less a day, consisting of a one-year jail term and one-year house arrest, was significantly less than the mandatory life sentence for murder ("The Robert Latimer murder case," 1997), and might suggest some sanctioning of his behaviour. These and other factors suggest that the media coverage of the Latimer case would be likely to result in copycat cases.

Following Tracy Latimer's much publicized homicide, some intrafamilial homicides of children with developmental disabilities in Canada appeared to bear similarities to Tracy's homicide regarding choice of victim, motivation, and act causing death. In December 1994, shortly after the close of the first Latimer trial, in Ontario, 16-year-old Ryan Wilkieson was killed by his mother who also took her own life. Ryan was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. He and his mother died by carbon monoxide poisoning in the back seat of the family car in the garage. Cathy Wilkieson was described as a caring mother who murdered the child she loved. The mother had left a note for her daughter and husband, suggesting premeditation (MacDougall, 1994; Edwards, 1994). In 1996, 35-year-old Andrea Halpin, described as mentally handicapped, was shot to death by her father Bernard Halpin prior to his taking his own life. Mr. Halpin, described as loving and caring father, had reportedly been worried and insecure about his daughter's future should he die. Premeditation was suggested by the telephone call the father had placed prior to taking his own life, and by documents left by the father detailing burial requests (Wilton, 1996a; 1996b). In 1996, in Montreal, six-year-old Charles Antoine Blais, who had been diagnosed with autism, was drowned by his mother Danielle Blais in the bathtub. Ms. Blais' lawyer reportedly stated that his client could not explain her actions because it was an act of love (Solomon, 1996).

Based on the media information provided, what these cases appear to have in common with the Latimer homicide is that all the children had disabilities, were killed by their parents, with the parents appearing to justify their actions by stating that they loved their children and wanted to prevent them from perceived suffering. The majority of intrafamilial homicides were also planned. In addition, while help was available to these parents concerning child care, the parents perceived this help to be either insufficient or inappropriate and perceived themselves as being the only persons able to provide for the best interests of their children. This misperception might, in part, have contributed to the parents choosing death for their children as a better alternative than living with a disability.

One of many alternative interpretations may be that these parents were having difficulty coping with their own issues such as depression and that caregiving demands were a variable in this equation. It was reported by Ryan Wilkieson's father that Cathy Wilkieson was undergoing personal crises at the time she killed herself and her son, and that their deaths were not related to a perceived lack of government support for Ryan (Blatchford, 1995; Galloway, 1995; Nielsen, 1995). Bernard Halpin removed his daughter from a provincially sponsored job training program prior to her death, wanting to take care of Andrea himself following the death of her mother (Wilton, 1996b). A psychiatrist testified in court that Robert Latimer, who killed his daughter shortly before her scheduled surgery, reportedly had a phobic reaction to medical instruments and procedures, which contributed to his overall personality (Henton, 1997).

Canada has seen a sharp increase in intrafamilial homicides of children 12 years of age or younger since 1993. Statistics Canada reported that the average percentage of parent-child homicides as a percentage of all homicide incidents was 5.3% between 1974-83. The average percentage dropped to 4.9% between 1984-93, but increased to 7.1% for 1994-98 (Fedorowycz, 2000). This increase, at a time when the overall homicide rate has been declining, along with the fact that almost all of the increased killing of children has come from fathers, not mothers, suggests that the massive media coverage of the Latimer trials beginning in 1994 may have contributed to the murders of many children by their parents (Sobsey, 2001b).

Grossman (1995) uses distance theory to explain how soldiers are desensitized to killing. This theory may also, in part, explain how parents kill their children and how some in society have accepted the homicides of others. Grossman explained that soldiers must achieve a psychological distance from their opponent. This is accomplished, in part, by distancing oneself from the victim, whether morally, defined by one belief in moral superiority; socially, where the victim is perceived as being of a lower social class; or mechanically, defined by the physical distance from the victim one's weapon allows. The greater the distance one can achieve, the less difficult it becomes emotionally and psychologically, to kill someone.

Robert Latimer demonstrated distance theory in his confession about his daughter's death. He first considered shooting Tracy in the head and burning her body, prior to killing her by means of carbon monoxide while she sat in the cab of the family truck, covered by a sleeping bag (Canadian Press, 1997; Jang, 1994a). By shooting his daughter, Mr. Latimer would have had to be close enough to her to ensure that he would not miss. This would imply a shorter mechanical distance than gassing Tracy in the cab of the truck, while standing outside the vehicle. If Tracy had been shot, Mr. Latimer would have witnessed first hand the results of a gunshot wound to the head. Emotionally, this would be more difficult to defend against if the finger that pulled the trigger was one's own. By gassing his daughter while she was in the cab of the truck, Mr. Latimer did not have to see her die since she was covered by a sleeping bag and the windows eventually fogged up (Jang, 1994b). Socially, Mr. Latimer defended his actions by claiming that his behaviour was motivated by mercy, compassion and love (O'Hanlon, 1997). Mercy would imply that the act was done with the best interests of his daughter in mind.

Public opinion may have been shaped, in part, by the media and court proceedings or may have been a factor in shaping media coverage. The media's portrayal of the death of PWCP was predominantly through the use of descriptors emphasizing suffering and affliction and in terms of mercy or euthanasia. Initial judicial response to Robert Latimer's actions was to show leniency, with his behaviour generally portrayed as morally and socially acceptable. Bar-Tal (2000) commented on the formation of societal beliefs, stating that its content is "based on collective experiences of society members, whether real or imagined and/or on implications that are drawn from these experiences" (p. 56). The author further stated that, "usually, there is no single societal belief formed on the basis of a collective experience, but rather a number of beliefs organized around a particular theme" (p. 56). The common collective experience of Tracy Latimer's death and her father's legal proceedings, as played out in the media and consumed by the public, would suggest that societal beliefs were, in part, shaped by the common themes of cerebral palsy, suffering and mercy killing.

Our initial hypothesis that the media used more stigmatizing language when providing coverage of homicides or PWCP was supported by results from this study. The three theoretical considerations on which the hypothesis was based also appeared to be supported by the findings from this study. In Tracy Latimer's case, Tracy's victim status was generalized as a characteristic of the individual not her circumstance. The "pathetic-victim" role was used to explain and excuse crimes against Tracy, and her father's defense against criminal charges of homicide was presented in terms of his desire to eliminate Tracy's suffering. Our second hypothesis that the media would emphasize mercy killing or euthanasia over other categories of homicide, when reporting homicides of PWCP, was also supported by findings from this study. Lastly, the hypothesis that stigmatizing language labels would predominantly be used in news stories about the homicide of Tracy Latimer was also supported by findings from this study.

Conclusion

The media's use of stigmatizing language in describing PWCP varied in topic, but was predominantly evident within the context of homicide of PWCP. Reference to the homicide of Tracy Latimer dominated homicide coverage of PWCP. The use of the terms *mercy killing* and *euthanasia* and descriptors such as *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffers from* or *suffering from*, were most frequently associated with Tracy's homicide. The findings of this study, based on one measure of media bias, demonstrated bias for justification of killing Tracy Latimer and are consistent with other reports of media bias in favor of justification (Goyette (1994a; 1994b), Canadian Press (1995), and Rielly (2001). While this study measured bias in one particular manner and showed a clear indication of media bias, it does not necessarily follow that other measures of media bias would show the same direction or degree of bias. The possible implications of this media coverage for the public, public reaction to this coverage, and possible explanations for public reaction are explored.

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Chapter V

Conclusion

The papers that comprise chapters II and III of this thesis have provided a preliminary description of homicides committed against people with developmental disabilities (PWDD). In Chapter II, 1128 media cases of homicides of PWDD involving 1967 deaths were examined. Acquaintances, caregivers, family members, government representatives, roommates, and strangers were implicated in these deaths. The majority of PWDD killed were male, four years of age or younger. Individuals responsible for these deaths were predominantly male, with the exception of the Family group. Most PWDD died as a result of neglect, being burned, beaten, shot, or asphyxiated.

In Chapter III, 308 cases of intrafamilial homicides of PWDD representing 314 PWDD killed were examined. Intrafamilial homicides represented 15.96% of overall homicides of PWDD. A similar number of male and female homicides were reported. Compared to other family members, biological parents were most frequently implicated in the deaths of PWDD, including cases of murder-suicide. Biological mothers most frequently killed daughters, while biological fathers most frequently killed sons. The majority of PWDD killed were four years of age or younger. Being beaten, shot, neglected, asphyxiated, burned and poisoned, were the most common causes of death. The limited conviction information that was available indicated that the majority of family members were convicted of murder and manslaughter. The average number of years of incarceration was 10.71.

The results from the first two studies supported, in part, findings from previous studies on homicide, fatal child abuse, intrafamilial homicide, and media analysis of homicide, suggesting similarities between the homicide of PWDD and those without developmental disabilities. No comparison information was available concerning caregivers and government representatives implicated in homicides of PWDD.

In Chapter IV, Canadian media's representation of people with cerebral palsy (PWCP) in public life were examined. Between January 1994 and December 2000, 3939 media stories indexed included the term *cerebral palsy*. The media's use of stigmatizing language such as *afflicted by*, *afflicted with*, *suffered from*, *suffers from*, or *suffering from*, was significantly increased when cerebral palsy was discussed in relationship with homicide compared to stories discussing cerebral palsy and other topics.

The increased use of stigmatizing language that has been specifically prohibited by media stylebooks provides a quantitative and relatively objective measure of bias. While qualitative analysis of these stories is more subjective, it provides a richer indication of the bias. This kind of qualitative analysis has previously been discussed (e.g., Sobsey, 1995). For example, the media's continued portrayal of Mr. Latimer as a model citizen was troubling in view of the almost total exclusion of publication of his previous arrests and convictions. Some stories described Tracy's pending hip surgery to relieve her pain, as amputation or mutilation and many described it as an exotic procedure. In fact, the removal of the head of the femur is one major part of every hip replacement surgery and has been frequently discussed in unrelated news stories where it is not typically labeled as "amputation" of "mutilation." About 40,000 hip and knee replacement surgeries are performed each year in Canada, and a significant number undergo the procedure on a second joint. While many argue that such joint replacements should remain restricted to hospitals and not contracted out to private clinics, the main concern that most patients have is merely how long they have to wait for surgery that relieves their discomfort (e.g., Gregoire, 1999).

The quantitative analysis of media coverage of Tracy Latimer's homicide provided a more objective measure of the media associating stigmatizing terms with the killing of PWCP, particularly within the context of mercy killing and/or euthanasia and cerebral palsy. The reason for this bias is not clear. One possibility is that the authors and editors chose to simplify the story or chose to make it fit into a preconceived framework. This theory suggests that the story was originally framed as, "would it be okay for a compassionate and loving father, who was model citizen, to kill his daughter rather than allow her to continue to live with extreme, unrelenting, and unrelievable suffering?" The reality of the story became much more complex as doubts were raised that he was a model citizen or that his daughter was experiencing extreme, unrelenting, or unrelievable suffering. These complexities may have been seen as detracting from the central concept and therefore better ignored or blurred to make reality better reflect the ideal case.

It is also possible that pre-existing alliances around other issues such as assisted suicide played a role in the representation of this case. Many stories connected this case with other social issues such as suicide (19.0% of stories found using Canadian Newsdisc), assisted suicide (12.7% of stories), abortion (8.7% of stories), or the "right to die" (5.6% of stories). These issues have existing supporters, both in the media and the public, and biases reflected may have represented positions on the constellation of related issues as much as the case itself.

In the United States and Canada, the primary proponents of "right to die" movements include people with strong links to news media and have been effective in influencing the media. For example, John Hofsess, who was founder and leader of Canada's Right to Die Society was a former writer for Macleans and a number of Canadian newspapers. In January, 1993, after Sue Rodriguez denied writing a letter, published as hers, that criticized people with disabilities who opposed euthanasia, John Hofsess admitted authoring the letter and signing her initials in shaky script to simulate her neurological condition (Hobbs Birnie, & Rodriguez, 1994). The letter had been published across six columns on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun* after Hofsess gave it to reporter Anne Mullins with a note claiming that it had been drafted by Rodriguez. Although Anne Mullins has been an outspoken advocate for the right to die movement in her own right, and likely knew that Hofsess' career in journalism had ended after concerns over plagiarism, her failure to check the source was probably an honest mistake.

The positions of various reporters, editors, and media factions on this broader spectrum of issues likely played some role in the reporting of the Latimer case. However, traditional liberal-conservative, right-left dichotomies do not appear to be predictors of reporting on this issue. While some religious and ultra-conservative media have been clearly against special treatment or reduced penalties for Robert Latimer (e.g., Alberta Report has consistently condemned the killing of Tracy Latimer as murder), opinion from liberal sources appears to be sharply split. *Canadian Dimension,* which commonly is viewed as Canada's socialist perspective, published an article written from a human rights perspective strongly condemning the killing of Tracy Latimer and suggesting that any lesser penalty in such a case violates the Charter guarantee to equal protection of the law (Malhotra, 2001). However, the article drew strong reaction from other prominent leftists including Svend Robinson (Robinson & Assels, 2001).

The vulnerability of PWDD from abuse and discrimination resulting in their homicide through the action or inaction of others has been demonstrated by findings from the first two studies. The very young appeared particularly at risk. With intrafamilial homicide, research suggests that, aside from these stories being considered newsworthy, they may also generally reflect the characteristics of these types of homicides of PWDD in society. The third study demonstrated that the Canadian media's use of stigmatizing language in describing PWCP was predominantly evident in stories concerning their homicide. The portrayal, by some members of the media, of the killing of Tracy Latimer as a justifiable act appeared to have contributed, in part, to public opinion and reaction in support of Robert Latimer's killing of his daughter. Public opinion and reaction may have further been shaped, in part, by court proceedings, or may have been a factor in further shaping media coverage. These factors may have contributed to the resulting copycat crimes.

Research Limitations

The preliminary description presented in this thesis must be considered to be tentative because of the potential distortion introduced as a result of dependence on print-media reports for data about homicide. The rules that guide editorial policies in determining which stories are covered or whether a homicide victim's developmental disability is mentioned remain largely unknown and are almost certainly inconsistent across newspapers and time. Specific editorial policies are likely to produce systematic error in the data gleaned from news stories. Inconsistency in these policies is likely to produce additional variability that is less systematic. In spite of these limitations, however, the preliminary description offered in this thesis is a valuable first step toward understanding the phenomenon.

While the limitations associated with this source of data are unquestionably greater than those associated with typical sources of homicide data, it is important to point out that traditional sources also have significant limitations as valid representatives of the phenomenon of homicide. One of the most obvious of these limitations results from the fact that perpetrators of homicide often go to great lengths to conceal their acts as natural deaths or accidents. As a result, traditional databases can only provide information about deaths that are clearly identified as homicides. For example, experts believe that a significant number (probably about 10% of cases) of sudden unexplained deaths in infants are actually homicides (Mitchell, Krous, Donald, & Byard, 2000). However, in many such cases it is impossible to say so with certainty, and the classification of all such deaths as homicides would result in false accusations against many innocent and grieving parents. One study of "underascertainment" found that of more than 53,000 sudden infant deaths, 6.4% were classified as intentional or suspicious, while an additional 15.1% were found to have unknown causes and appear to be a mixture of intentional and natural deaths (Overpeck, Brenner, Cosgrove, Trumble, Kochanek, & MacDorman, 2002). Thus, the cases of unidentified homicides are likely to outnumber identified cases in this group.

Furthermore, even if disability status was coded as part of the existing homicide data, the underascertainment factor would be likely to be different for homicide victims with diagnosed disabilities than for those without disabilities. For example, in some cases, the diagnosis of epilepsy has been used to suggest what would otherwise appear to be apparent homicides are actually the result of sudden unexplained death that is known to occur, albeit very rarely, in epilepsy. In one case, a woman was accused of repeatedly running over her twin brother with a car in order to gain an inheritance. In another case, a woman was accused of suffocating a foster child who she had restrained in a high chair using 42 feet of duct tape including tape over the child's nose and mouth. In both cases, the defense argued that since the alleged victims were epileptic and could have died at any time from sudden unexplained death, the actual cause of death could be natural and not due to homicide. While the foster mother was convicted of homicide (Nacelewicz, 2002), the sister was convicted only of attempted murder since it was proven that she planned the murder and drove over her brother believing that he was alive as she was killing him. The judge in that case directed an acquittal on murder charges on the basis of the possibility that the man happened to die naturally at the precise time his sister was trying to murder him, since epilepsy is associated with sudden unexplained death (Gregory, 1996).

The issue of ascertainment of homicide in people with significant disability-related health risks is actually much broader than the issue raised in these two cases. For example, Alberta initiated an "Expected Home Death Certificate" program in 1980. Under this program doctors can pre-register expected deaths of individuals, including children, who are considered to be likely to die. There are several important benefits to families when an individual dies at home and has a pre-registered certificate. The family is generally spared the intrusion of police and the medical examiner who would otherwise be expected to closely examine a home death. When such a death is pre-registered, it is only required that a physician sign a death certificate within 48 hours of a death. As Alberta's Deputy Chief Medical examiner, Dr. Lloyd Denmark, pointed out, " The drawback is the potential that somebody could abuse it to hide a euthanasia situation, or very occasionally, it could be used to cover-up a homicide." (Canadian Press, 1996, p. A.5). Since deaths under this program are not typically examined, how many may be incidents of homicide is strictly a matter of speculation. What we can say with certainty is that children with developmental disabilities are much more likely to be victims of child abuse than other children and are much more likely to be candidates for "expected death" programs. As a result, such programs exempt the deaths of the children who are in the highest risk category from close inspection. It is certainly likely that if such a program had been in place in Saskatchewan in 1993, the death of Tracy Latimer would never have been identified as a homicide. While it is likely that many Canadians believe that simply letting such cases slip by would be better, there are many others who find this prospect troubling and wonder how many similar cases occur under the cover of various forms of "expected death" plans.

While the limitations resulting from the use of news stories make it impossible to determine the actual incidence of these homicides, the finding of more than 1100 cases suggests that these homicides are not rare events and may be fairly common. This finding suggests that more systematic study is needed. This could be accomplished through studies that develop their own databases, but might be better accomplished if data were collected on pre-existing disabilities and included in existing databases. For example, including information about pre-existing disabilities on Uniform Crime reports and Death certificates would enable researchers to study homicides involving victims with developmental disabilities using the same databases used for other homicide studies.

The use of content analysis in analyzing media accounts of homicides of PWDD has several disadvantages, which were addressed by this study. Babbie (1999) notes that by analyzing existing records, one is dependent on the accuracy and objectivity of those records. In our studies, the reporters conveyed information concerning the people and circumstances of the homicide. Inaccuracies in reporting, such as the demographics of the victim or perpetrator, could not be substantiated unless conflicting or updated information was provided. The researcher accepted the label given by reporters as factual and did not attempt to re-label suspects unless two stories about the same event reported conflicting information. In these cases, an attempt to identify the most reliable information was made. If conflicts could not be resolved, the case was reclassified as unknown.

Both objective and systematic techniques of content analysis are addressed by reliability measures. Babbie (1999) notes that, with content analysis, information can be recoded as often as is necessary to ensure that the coding is stable or consistent, as was done in this study. Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney (1998) note that consistency and reproducibility can be assessed by having different coders code the same content the same way, with content coded according to mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive categories. Mutually exclusive categories are those wherein items or content can only be coded in one particular way. Collectively exhaustive categories are those wherein every item or content is coded. This may require the use of such categories as "other," or "unknown." Both mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive categories were used in the present study.

Regarding validity, Krippendorff (1980) states that the researcher relies "on various forms of partial and indirect evidence about the phenomena of interest or on evidence in a form similar but not identical to the findings, leaving direct-evidence for postfact and hence retroactive validation efforts" (p.156). Results from the first two studies were presented in light of the limitations of the research method. They are predominantly descriptive, and intended to stimulate research in the area for further validation of findings.

Babbie (1999) explains that problems of validity stem from the limitations of examining existing data. Existing data may not consistently or completely provide information on all the variables one is interested in, and one's measurements may not always be completely valid representations of those variables from which one would like to draw conclusions. The author goes on to explain that one relies on logical reasoning and replication to address these problems of validity when analysing existing data. Through the use of several independent tests of one's hypothesis, the combined confirmation of these tests would, in part, provide support for one's hypothesis. For example, Krippendorff (1980) defined semantical validity as, "the degree to which a method is sensitive to the symbolic meanings that are relevant within a given context" (p. 157). The author goes on to explain that this is achieved, "when the semantics of the data language corresponds to that of the source, the receiver, or any other context relative to which data are examined" (p. 157). In our study, acts of homicide were described and labelled according to subjective interpretations of those acts by reporters reporting on those crimes. If different reporters consistently defined similar acts of homicide under a common term, then one may partially conclude that the common term may be used to define specific acts. For example, if the act of manually using a pointed object to pierce someone's body is defined as being stabbed, then being stabbed may be defined by having one's body pierced by a knife, shank, pointed stick, sword, or spear.

Carney (1972) states that "content analysis is a technique designed for processing abundant data" (p. 193), requiring a specific minimum number of samples, rich in detail. Krippendorff (1980) states that "a sample is valid to the extent its composition, whether in proportion, scale or distribution, corresponds to the composition of the universe for which it is intended to stand" (p. 157). As Berger (1998) notes, studying a sizable amount of content is one means to address potential difficulties with representative sampling, as was done in the three studies.

Albarran (1996) reports on the limited expression and diversity of opinion in newspaper content. Albarran notes that the newspaper market is highly monopolistic, with over 85 percent of daily newspapers owned by large corporate newspaper companies. "The rise in chain ownership, coupled with market concentration, has raised industry concerns about the push for profits at the expense of journalistic endeavours, diversity of expression and balanced presentation" (p. 158). This concern was addressed by the use of varied media sources, both internationally, as seen with the first two studies, and nationally, as seen with all three studies, in obtaining information on the homicide of PWDD.

Clinical Implications

The results from this study indicated that PWDD are being killed, and that the Canadian media's portrayal of the homicide of PWCP predominantly stigmatizes the victim. Those implicated in the deaths of PWDD are predominantly people who have provided for their health and welfare in the past, including family members, caregivers, and government representatives. What is unclear is the likely greater number of PWDD who have been, and continue to be victims of violence.

The chronic and severe impact of abuse on physical and emotional functioning has been well documented. Leverich, McElroy, Suppes et al. (2002) determined that childhood physical and sexual abuse were associated with an adverse course of bipolar disorder. Childhood maltreatment and maladaptive parental behaviour has been shown to be associated with the development of eating disorders or weight problems during adolescence and early adulthood (Johnson, Cohen, Kasen, & Brook, 2002). Cheasty, Clare, and Collins (2002) concluded that child sexual abuse was a predictor of persistent depression in women who were sexually assaulted or raped in adult life, while Harkness and Monroe (2002) found that severe physical abuse, sexual abuse, antipathy, and neglect were significantly associated with depression in women. Beers and De Bellis (2002) concluded that children with maltreatment-related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder presented with impaired neuropsychological functioning relating to measures of attention and abstract reasoning. These findings would suggest that trauma associated with victimization could be long lasting. The impact these mental health concerns might have on PWDD and their ability to access appropriate community resources is unclear.

Counselling and treatment services for PWDD who have been abused may help to reduce their risk from future victimization. Mansell and Sobsey (2001) provided information on the patterns and effects of sexual abuse on PWDD and discussed different therapy modalities for use with these clients. Therapeutic intervention and access to treatment programs for PWDD who have been abused may help to reduce the potential physical and psychological trauma frequently associated with abuse.

Many factors place PWDD at risk for discrimination. Some ways to reduce risks associated with having a developmental disability are through proper screening of potential caregivers and parents providing services to PWDD. For example, the Child Abuse Potential Inventory, a psychometric measure, has been shown to differentiate between subtypes of maritally violent men and nonviolent men. Findings indicated that the borderline/dysphoric batterer subtype obtained significantly higher child abuse potential scores than other violent subtypes and nonviolent comparison groups (Herron & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2002). Walsh, MacMillan, and Jamieson (2002) concluded that a parental history of depression, mania, or schizophrenia increased the rates of child abuse by two to three times.

Other psychometric measures assessing general ability, personality functioning, parenting knowledge, and parenting attitudes may be useful in identifying those individuals who may benefit from parenting education and/or therapeutic intervention to address mental health concerns, that may negatively impact a person's ability to provide for the health and welfare of those under their care. Criminal background evaluations, references, training, observation, and evaluation of potential caregivers may also help to identify those individuals potentially at greater risk for abuse.

Family support needs to be accessible to those who request it, and supportive monitoring of families with infants who have developmental disabilities is suggested to ensure that new parents are assisted with any potential concerns. Research has shown that partner violence and caregiver distress, within the context of high levels of family stress, increase the risk for child abuse (Salzinger, Feldman, Ng-Mak, Mojica, Stockhammer, & Rosario, 2002). Helping families help themselves to reduce their perceived levels of stress may help to reduce the risk for child abuse.

Education of caregivers in identifying and reporting cases of abuse would hopefully prevent further abuses from occurring. For example, Lagerberg (2001) concluded that concern with abuse and neglect did not appear to be priorities for the majority of child health centers in Sweden, and that nurses' awareness of child abuse and neglect was low. More effective screening of abuses by health centers may help to prevent chronic abuses and ultimately reduce the number of fatalities resulting from these.

Greater sensitivity by the media through the use of neutral language, when portraying PWDD, especially when they are victims of homicide, may further contribute to a positive change in public opinion and reaction. In an analysis of media constructions of crime, Sacco (1995) observed that the news media contributed an important element to framing certain social problems in a number of ways, implying different causal factors and possible solutions. This finding appeared most evident in the media's portrayal of PWCP, as previously discussed in chapter four. By framing homicides of PWCP as acts of mercy, and portraying their lives as based on suffering, alternative media interpretations of these crimes appeared to be limited. By expanding media analysis of these crimes in terms of potential causal factors contributing to the homicide of PWCP, a greater number of possible solutions may result.

Nibert (1995) commented that "in the late 20th century, widespread devaluation of people with disabilities remains and continues to help legitimate social inequality" (p. 59). The author argued that their devalued social status was a social construct "based on their exclusion from the labor force and that their social exclusion and scapegoating have served to legitimate 20th century capitalism" (p. 77). By fostering an environment based on inclusion and humanization greater acceptance of individual differences and less discrimination may result. This suggests that societal perceptions of PWDD need to further change to reduce prejudices and discrimination in the media, literature, science, medicine, education, employment, and law. For example, proposals for changes in the law have been suggested to provide a multi-tiered legal system addressing crimes perpetrated against PWDD, and making those crimes less severe than those perpetrated against people without developmental disabilities, as seen in cases of compassionate homicide (Woodard, 1998). Proposals to provide certain rights solely based on one's disability, as seen with *euthanasia*, *assisted suicide*, *mercy killing*, or *summary resolution*, also unfairly single out PWDD, and communicate to society that death is an acceptable alternative to living with a disability. That decisions are generally based on our subjective perception of another's quality of life, and that PWDD may have difficulty communicating their wishes, places them at risk. Protection of vulnerable populations in society is given to animals, children, injured workers, and the disabled. However, given that a large number of PWDD are being killed by those who are in a position of providing care for them suggests that more can be done to protect PWDD from being victimized.

Further research is needed to conclude, with confidence, the suggested findings from the first two studies, and to determine if Canadian media's portrayal of PWCP can be generalized to the media's portrayal of all PWDD. In order for this research to be conducted, documentation of homicides of PWDD is needed along parameters that includes information on whether or not the person had a disability, the extent of the disability, and whether it was a factor in death. Changes to the U.S. National Crime Survey have recently been made to provide information on whether a victim has a disability or not (Petersilia, Foote, & Crowell, 2001). This type of information may provide a clearer picture of the extent and degree of homicides of PWDD, and those implicated in these acts.

Additional media analysis of the portrayal of PWCP in homicide news could involve examining Canadian newspapers reflecting the different newspaper industry owners and Canada's national agenda concerning commentary and investigative reporting. Taras (1999) identified the *Globe and Mail* as being at the forefront of the Canadian newspaper industry. Conrad Black's *Ottawa Citizen* was considered to predominantly reflect the owner's reported right-wing opinions. Mr. Black reportedly controls more than half of Canada's 105 daily newspapers. Taras identified the *Toronto Star* as being independent of other newspaper chains. Selected articles from the *Globe and Mail*, *Ottawa Citizen*, and *Toronto Star* could be compared along the parameters previously examined regarding the use of biased language in describing people with cerebral palsy.

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